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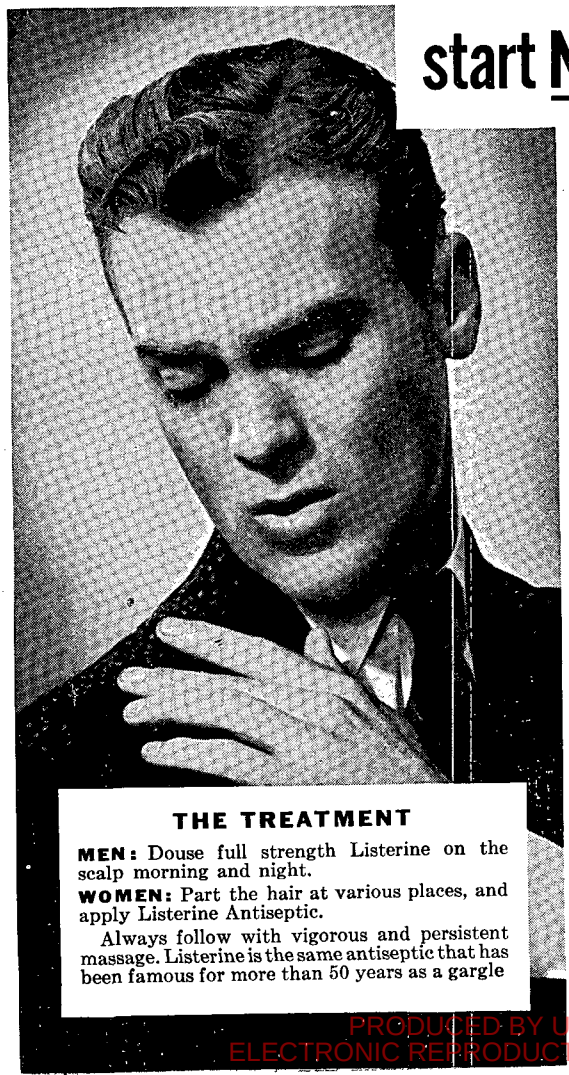

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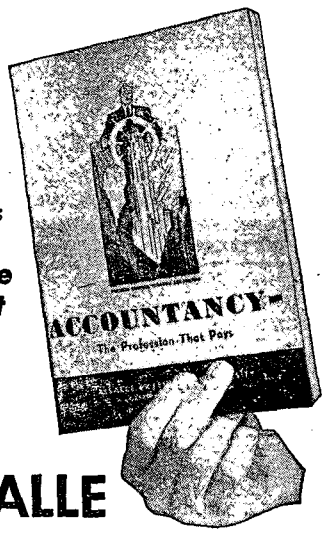

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Vol. V NOVEMBER, 1942 No. 1

Complete Book-Length Novel

The Mouthpiece of Zitu — J. U. Giesy — 6

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Published serially in the All-Story Weekly, July 5, 1919

Serial

Into the Infinite — Part Two — Austin Hall — 107

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Published in the All-Story Weekly, April 12, 1919

Short Story

The Demoiselle D'Ys — Robert W. Chambers — 133

This gem of fantasy is one of a collection of short stories under the title of "The King in Yellow" which was the cornerstone of the successful career of Robert W. Chambers, the novelist. The book was originally published in 1895 and has always been a choice and rare item for fantastic story collectors.

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Feature

The Readers' Viewpoint — 141

This magazine is published once a month. The December issue will be on sale Oct. 16.

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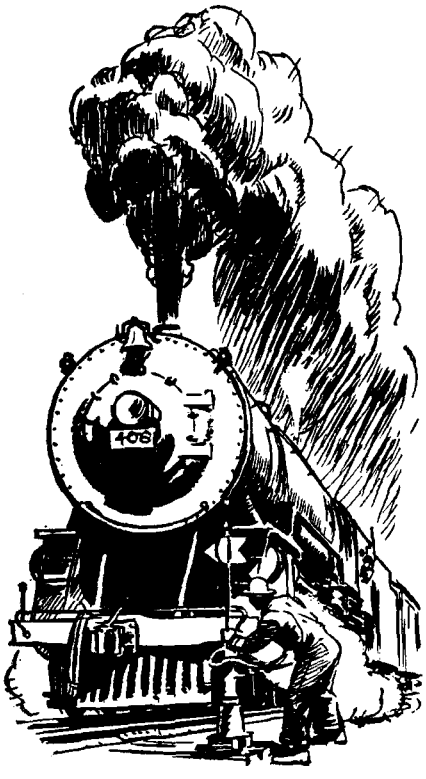

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A click, a hiss, the crackling ignition of incandescent carbon, and the first electric light on Palos shone down on lovely Naia

The Mouthpiece of Zitu

By J. U. Giesy

CHAPTER I

THE NEW PATIENT

I TOOK my stethoscope and went over the patient's chest. I wanted to determine his general condition, since he was now committed to my care as medical director of the State Hospital for the Insane. He had struck me as being in a rather bad way when he was brought in from the capital city farther north. It was part of my professional duty to look out for his physical welfare as well as endeavor to set right his distorted brain.

I had one of the nurses remove the hospital garment into which he had been put, and then I set the disk of my in-

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strument over the region of his heart. It was bad, very bad indeed. The burr and whisper of its labored action came through his emaciated flesh with surprising loudness. I frowned and went on to the lungs, and found them suffering from the effects of that faulty circulation.

A dissociation of personality had been alleged by the physicians who had sent him into my hands. In other words, the man was supposed not to know who he was—to have lost his true identity, or be confused about it in his own mind. But the case was not violent, had given no indications of any wish to work harm to any one about him. Indeed, the entire course until now had been of a melancholic turn.

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I finished my examination and straightened, and met the regard of his eyes. They were a very dark brown, and they were fixed intently on my face. What was more, they gave me one of the oddest sensations I had ever had in my life.

I had never seen the man before. Of that I was positive. And yet as I met the steady glance he held upon me, I felt that I knew those eyes—the eyes, mind you—or what was behind them—looking out as through a window in a darkened house. I'm not sure, but I think I caught my breath.

"Send the nurse away, will you, Dr. Murray?"

For the first time during my examination the patient spoke, and the sound of it was almost like a half-checked laugh. It was as though the man felt a perfectly sane and understanding amusement in the situation in which he found himself.

Then as I hesitated, more in surprise than from any other reason, he went on: "Oh, I'll not be violent or try to escape, or anything like that. I merely want to talk to you—yourself."

I nodded to the attendant, who left the room, and turned back once more to encounter those strangely familiar eyes.

"Don't you know me, Dr. Murray?" their owner inquired.

"I never saw you before," I said, determined to meet this phase of the man's condition, whatever it was, in as natural a way as I might. "And yet—" Right there I paused.

"And yet—you aren't sure about the denial even while you make it." He laughed without any sound. Insane in a mild way he might be, but he certainly seemed to know what he was saying and to be enjoying the somewhat puzzled expression which I fancy must have shown upon my face. "Murray, you're both right and wrong. You've never seen this body, so far as I know, but I hardly think you've forgotten Jason Croft."

"Croft! Good Heavens!"

The words dribbled off my lips. I gasped. Now I knew what it was about those eyes that held me. Croft I had not forgotten, but—so far as earth was concerned—he had died; I had pronounced him dead myself; had seen his body consigned to the grave. And it had been the body of a splendidly proportioned man—no such pitiful physical wreck as this figure in the bed.

But it had been Jason Croft who had given to me what as nearly amounted to a proof of spiritual life apart from the mortal body as any man might have—who had told me, shortly before his death occurred, the most remarkable tale my ears had ever heard, a tale incredible in itself, and yet one which, despite all arguments against it, I had always felt myself inclined to believe. In addition to that, when his story was ended he had announced that he was forsaking his earthly body for life on another planet; had told me that some day I would receive a call and find his earthly body dead, but that on that other star, Palos—a world in the system of Sirius the Dog Star—he would be possessed of another body and Naia, Princess of Aphur, as wife.

UNBELIEVABLE? Of course it was unbelievable. And yet Croft's earth body died, just as he said it would. And if any one could have heard his story as I did when he told it, I think the auditor would have been moved to credence just as I was myself.

Croft was a physician even as I am. He was a scientific man. In addition, he was a student of what most of us call the occult—the science of the mind, the spirit, the soul. So much I know, not only from his words but material evidence. His former home had contained the greatest private collection of works on the subject I have ever seen. According to his own statements, he had advanced so far in his investigations of the subject that he could project his own astral body anywhere at will. And by anywhere, I mean to be understood in the literal sense.

Many men have acquired the ability of which he was master, as applying to the earthly sphere; Croft, however, had carried it to its ultimate degree and had shaken off or entered the atmospheric envelope of our planet at will. In our conversation, which ended with his announcement that he was going back to Palos to wed Naia and live out his life in that other world, he had explained the whole thing to me—largely as I felt at the time and after, because I had dabbled in the occult to some extent, and he knew I would understand, in part at least.

In making clear his motives he had even broached the subject of twin souls—the doctrine that each spirit is original-

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ly dual, but incarnates as two individuals—a male and a female in the flesh. He alleged that since a child he had felt a vague prompting toward the Dog Star, which he could not understand until he went there in the astral form, once he had gained the power, and found on Palos a woman—his true counterpart, his twin soul, as he declared his belief.

But, to accomplish his mating with her, Croft declared further that he had done a most remarkable thing. Discovering a man dying from a mental rather than a bodily condition on the other star, he had waited until his death occurred and then appropriated the still physically viable body to himself; and he explained the thing in a very comprehensible manner at the time, describing the whole procedure in a scientific way, until unbelief faltered and one felt that the thing had been done.

Over that body he had acquired as full control as he had of his own. He might at will throw it into a cataleptic sleep. After that he led a sort of double existence—sometimes on Palos, sometimes on earth—until his plans were finally shaped. Then, and then only, did he finally forsake the mundane life for that other and fuller existence which he felt the Palosian girl would make complete.

At the time I had questioned him as fully as time and my own knowledge would permit, and he had answered in a way which not only convinced me, but amazed me.

I had asked him concerning the time of his passing from earth to that other distant star billions of miles across space, in a universe outside our own. And he had replied that outside the mental atmosphere of man time did not exist; that between the planets was only eternity; that one could not use what was nonexistent; that he could reach Palos in the condition toward which he journeyed to it as quickly as I could project myself there in thought. In similar fashion he had been able to meet each of my several interrogative points. In the end I had been content to merely listen to the astounding narrative he told.

That story I had not forgotten any more than I had the man himself. But that he should have reversed the experiment which had given him a physical life on Palos in order to return to earth was more astounding still. And yet—if I were to believe the evidences of my well-nigh reeling senses—that was exactly what had occurred; because, no matter how beyond all accepted tenets of life the thing was, I couldn't help feeling that it was Croft's spirit looking out at me from the new patient's eyes.

Then as I stood there, tongue-tied, considering those things, he spoke again.

"Rather fusses you a bit, doesn't it, Murray? Well, never mind. I didn't expect to come back here when I left, but needs must, you know, as they say on earth. I don't wonder that it surprises you to find me speaking to you with the lips of this poor hulk of flesh—not very much like the one in which you knew me, is it?—but it will suffice, even if it has a pair of lungs badly engorged because of a very shaky heart. Your laboratory will show the kidneys affected, too. Oh, it's an incipient wreck that I'm holding together simply for my use—because I need it, and because I wanted to get down here with you."

"With—me?" I faltered. Almost as surprising as all else was his calm announcement that he was here because he wanted to see me.

He smiled slightly. "Yes—you, of course. Murray, come down to facts and quit speculation. There is nothing surprising in that. You were the only man on earth who knew my story—who had the truth—who could understand—and I knew you understood a good bit of the forces involved—the spiritual forces, that is. So, when I needed certain information which I couldn't gain save in the flesh, I knew you were the man to help me gain it—the one man to whom I could appeal with a chance of success. But in order to reach you I had to limit my choice of earthly bodies. That's how I came to choose this thing at which you're looking—"

"But—but—" I interrupted. "Good Heavens, Croft! I never dreamed of your reversing the process. I—"

He shook his head. "It's a poor rule that won't work both ways, isn't it, Murray?" he said.

I nodded. "Yes—of course. And you've really done it—come back—like this?"

I asked the question as I would have asked a similar one of Croft, because now I was convinced that I was speaking to the man himself—his intelligence, that is.

And he answered me without the least hesitation: "Yes. And it's your job to keep me alive until I can gain what I came for—to help me, if you will. Earth

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possesses knowledge I need on Palos for my work—you can help me gain it just as well here as anywhere else. 'Stone walls do not a prison make,' Murray or 'iron bars a cage.' Man, it's your co-operation for the advancement of a wonderful people I've come a-seeking. I want you to prescribe a certain course of study as a part of my treatment and discuss the things I'm after with me. Do you catch my plan?"

Oh, yes, I caught it. I began to understand. Bizarre, wonderful, beyond anything imaginable as it seemed. I felt that I appreciated the whole concept of his scheme. And I was flattered—I confess that I thrilled at his words—that he should have come to me for such aid as he felt I would give. All at once I had the feeling that a wonderful privilege was placed in my hands—that I was to have a part in this remarkable adventure between two worlds which Croft had made his. I made an effort to rally my staggering senses, and, as one will at such a time, I made a casual rather than a pertinent remark:

"Just how is the Princess Naia?" I asked.

Croft nodded. He seemed to find acceptance of my part in my question. "The Princess Naia is very much all right."

And then I remembered what he had told me before he went to Palos for what I had thought a definite stay. And it struck me that it was rather odd to be speaking of the Palosian girl as one would of a neighbor next door, but I amended my reference to her none the less: "Or perhaps I should have asked for Mrs. Croft—you said that you expected to be married immediately upon your return to Palos."

CHAPTER II

EXPLANATIONS

CROFT frowned. "What one expects and what one meets are not always one and the same, friend Murray," he rejoined. "As a matter of fact, I returned to Palos after my conversation with you, to encounter a situation of which I had never thought."

"You mean that it interfered with your marriage to the princess?" I exclaimed.

He made a grimace. "I mean exactly that, both on the part of Naia herself and because of something else. You remember Zud, the high priest of Zitra, the imperial city of which I told you—who sponsored me with Tamhys before the Zollarian war. And you recall no doubt that I mentioned the fact that I left the body of Jasor of Nodhur, which I had made my own, in Zud's apartments in the pyramid of Zitra when I came back here for the last time, and that Naia was quartered during my absence in the rooms set apart for the Gayana—the Vestals of Ga the Virgin in the pyramid, too. Murray, when I got back there, fully expecting to take things up where I had left them, I found that Zud had proclaimed me the Mouthpiece of Zitu himself."

"The Mouthpiece of Zitu!" I drew a chair close to the bed and sat down. The thing affected me oddly.

I cast back in my mind for what Croft had told me concerning the religion of Tamarizia, which was the nation in whose affairs he had taken an active part on the distant star. Zitu was God in their belief. Ga was the woman—a virgin. Azil was her son—known as the Giver of Life. And if Croft had been proclaimed by the high priest of the central state of the empire, the head of the clerical college, as the Mouthpiece of Zitu I began to sense dimly the position in which he must have found himself on his return—just what it might have meant.

If Zud had proclaimed Croft anything of the sort, it was just about the same as naming him the representative of the Divinity in the flesh—and from what Croft had told me of his claiming while in Tamarizia to do all that he did by the grace of Zitu—which was, of course, no more than the truth in a sense—I could see how his very words might have laid the foundation for the high priest's act.

Yet, Croft at our former conversation had said that he had induced the Tamarizians to adopt a republican way of government rather than their system of allied principalities, and had declared that when he went back he expected to be elected president. All that flashed through my mind, and then, "Rather changed your plans, I suppose," I said.

"Changed them?" he returned, with an almost whimsical expression. "Murray, it almost wrecked them at the start—the most important part of them, that is. Remember why I did what I did do really—that all I had done up until that time

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was in order to win the woman who meant more to me than anything else in life—and then picture if you can my mental condition when I found myself trapped, as it were, by my own acts."

"Your own?" I queried.

He nodded. "Oh, certainly yes—my own, of course—my acts and my overthought—my failing to take into account what a terrible impression I had managed to make on the high priest. I—hang it all, Murray—I knew so entirely what I was up to that I didn't give proper consideration to the effect of my words and acts must have on less well-informed minds. I failed to put myself in the place of Zud, and Magur, the head of the church in Aphur, whom I first enlisted in my aid at Himyra, as I told you before.

"You remember the old saying, 'Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad,' and one equally as true, that 'Pride goeth before a fall'? Well, my friend, I was a bit like that, I think, toward the last of the Zollarian war. Things came my way too fast. The completeness of the Tamarizian victory, and her father's pledge of the girl to me, backed up by the sanction of Jadgor, the Aphurian king, made me feel altogether secure.

"It seemed to me that there could be no question but I carried the destiny of myself and Naia and all Tamarizia in my hands. I had only to speak to see my commands fulfilled.

"Honestly, Murray, in those days I couldn't have been more absolute if I had been the Mouthpiece of Zitu indeed. Perhaps if I'd stayed there and rushed things through, everything would have been all right. But, as you know, I returned for a final visit to close up all matters pertaining to my earthly life before I snapped the astral chord which until then had kept my original body alive. And there was where I made my mistake.

"As I've told you, I left my Palosian body in Zud's quarters, rather magnificently placed. Zud saw to that. I suppose now he was turning the elements of what he fancied the truth in his old brain. My form was stretched out on a golden couch, covered with a sheet of orange-colored silk, in the apartment set apart for my use. And I'd been planning, as you know, many things I wanted to do. I'd drawn plans—designs for things common enough on earth, but never before dreamed of on Palos. And I left the drawing I had made in that room in a golden chest. You remember I told you gold was as plentiful on Palos as iron on earth and used as freely in the metal working arts.

"Night and day a guard was kept in the chamber where I lay in what they believed was my knowledge-gaining sleep. But—the guard was a priest. He would do anything Zud said, of course. I never thought of that. I was anxious only to get back here and close things up and return and claim Naia as my wife.

"So you see I fell into the error of not considering old Zud's thoughts or his interpretation of my claim that everything I did was by Zitu's grace. Of course that was plain enough, however, after I got back and found that he had all along placed a literal interpretation on my remarks and considered my sleeps as no more than a period of spiritual communion with Zitu himself. Then it became very forcibly clear to me that I should have taken Zud more fully into the truth of the facts. And because I hadn't I found myself in a most embarrassing case.

"The high priest had got into that golden box. He had examined my working charts. He had dimly sensed them as designs for things I meant to make—and his wonder knew no bounds. And after that he played the deuce, though I am convinced the old man only thought he was doing what was absolutely right, according to his lights."

"And Naia?" I asked. "How did she view your elevation to such a lofty state?"

Croft gave me a glance. "I told you Zud messed everything up," he replied. "But—it's a long story. Murray, this ramshackle carcass I've seized won't last out a great many days. The weakling soul who once possessed it broke it down by every sort of abuse, including drugs. But, I've got to learn certain things before I abandon its use.

"Suppose you send me up the latest works you have on internal medicine and surgery and therapeutics, and drop in tonight. If you're willing to sacrifice a few hours' sleep, I'll spin you the whole yarn."

"All right," I agreed as I rose. "I don't think I was ever more startled in my life, but I'll send up the books, and I'll be right here after nine myself."

"Right," he accepted. "My physicians wouldn't let me have tobacco, though

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this body craves it. Bring some cigars when you come, and we'll have a good long talk."

BEFORE, however, I enter upon Croft's actual story, I think it better perhaps to briefly describe, in some part at least, those details of the Palosian world with which he had put me in touch on the occasion of our former meeting to which I have already referred.

And toward a fuller understanding of that world itself, I think it best to take up the geography of that part of Palos Croft visited first. Mainly that which has to do with the Tamarizian nation—a series of allied principalities surrounding the shores of a vast inland sea, with the exception of a central state—the seat of the imperial capital, embracing the island of Hiranur, located in the sea itself, and the kingdom of Nodhur to the west and south.

From the central sea a narrow strait led west toward an outer ocean beyond the continent on which the several principalities found place. To the north of this strait, known as the Gateway, was Cathur, a mountainous country and the seat of the national university at its capital city Scira. East of Cathur was Mazhur, known at the time of Croft's arrival as the Lost State, since in a former war it had been wrested from the original Tamarizian group by the Zollarians, a hostile nation lying still farther north.

Croft, by defeating Zollaria, after his entertainment of physical life on Palos, had brought Mazhur back. In fact, he had just completed that bit of work at the time of our former conversation, thereby raising himself to a very high position of influence and power, as I have sought to indicate, and winning from Naia's father, Prince Lakkon of Aphur, the promise of his daughter's hand, as well as the consent of Jagdor, King of Aphur, and Naia's uncle, that the union should take place.

On Croft's advent Scythys—a man old to dotage—had been king of Cathur, with Kyphallos the crown prince, a profligate of the worst type, for a son. Yet Jadgor of Aphur, scenting a danger unless it was checked in advance in Kyphallos's ascent of the Cathurian throne, had sought to bind the northern prince to the Tamarizian fealty more surely by offering him Naia, his sister's child, to wife.

Kyphallos had, however, sunk under the enchantments of Kalamita, a Zollarian adventuress of great beauty, until he had reached the stage of plotted treason, planning to surrender Cathur to Zollaria in return for being given the throne of Tamarizia with Kalamita at his side.

To win Naia for himself, and overthrow Zollaria's designs against the southern nation had been Croft's main work, toward which he strained every nerve. Besides his development of the motor on Palos he introduced firearms as well, placed them in the hands of the Tamarizian soldiery until then armed with spears, swords, bows and arrows and shields, and defeated the flower of the Zollarian hosts on a couple of bloody fields. The victory complete and Zollaria not only defeated but forced to cede Mazhur after a tenure of fifty years, and it being the end of the Emperor Tamhys's reign, he had prevailed upon the nation to adopt a democratic form.

And now a word as to the Tamarizians themselves. They were a white and well-formed race. In their social structure women held an equal place with men. I have hinted at their religion. They believed in the spirit and a future life and the resurrection of the dead. In the sciences and arts they had made considerable progress.

The clothing of the women consisted of a single garment, falling to the knees

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East of Mazhur, and circling the central sea to the east, was Bithur, and Milidhur joined Bithur on the south. West of Milidhur was Aphur, completing the circle about the sea and terminating at the Gateway on the south. Nodhur lay south of Aphur, gaining an outlet to the central sea by means of the River Na. This river had carried commercial craft driven by sail and oar until Croft revolutionized transportation with alcohol-driven motors.

North of Tamarizia lay Zollaria, inhabited by a far more warlike race of whites. Its government was a despotism organized on militaristic lines. Controlling the gateway to the west, Tamarizia had remained the master, even after the fall of Mazhur, still collecting toll from the Zollarian craft on her rivers, despite the foothold gained by her foeman on the northern coast.

East of Zollaria and Tamarizia in the hinterland of the continent lay Mazzer, populated by an aboriginal people of a complexion distinctly blue. Due to an ancient conquest many of these people were now constituted as a working caste in Tamarizia.

Each of these states was governed by an hereditary king.

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The men of caste also wore a soft shirt or chemise beneath a metal cuirass or an embroidered tunic, as the case might be. Save on formal occasions, the serving classes, men and women, wore either a narrow cincture about the loins, supporting a small phallary or apron, or went nude about their tasks.

Agriculture was highly developed, and as a people they had advanced far in architecture, painting, sculpture, and similar arts. They lavished much time and expense in beautifying their houses—making of each a small palace, if the owner were rich. The highways along which the sarpelca caravans and the gnuppa-drawn carriages and chariots passed were models of engineering.

Naia lifted the cluster of blossoms and threw it against Croft's breast in what seemed to be a gesture of supreme contempt

or just below them, cinctured about the body, caught over one shoulder by a metal or jeweled boss, and leaving the other shoulder and arm exposed. To this was added sandals of leather, metal, or wood, held to the foot by a toe-and-instep band and lacings running well up the calves. Men of wealth and caste and soldiers and nobles, instead of these sandals, generally wore metal casings, which amounted to a sandal and leg piece jointed to allow the ankle full play and reaching nearly to the knees.

[The gnuppa is a creature seemingly half deer and half horse. The sarpelca is not unlike some weird Silurian lizard, twice the size of an elephant, with a pointed tail, a scale-armored back, a long neck somewhat resembling that of a camel, and the head of a marine serpent having a series of fleshy tentacles about the mouth. They are driven by reins affixed to these latter appendages, and stream across the Palosian deserts bearing merchandise upon their enormous backs.]

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All these things I knew from Croft's previous talks. He had told me he could go to Palos as quickly as I could think of it myself, and here I was anticipating a resumption that night of his story concerning beings I had never seen, with an eagerness amounting to impatience of the dragging hours.

Here was I thinking of Naia—the golden-haired, purple-eyed beauty of Aphur; of Lakkon, her father; of Jadgor, her uncle; of Robur, her cousin, the Aphurian crown prince and Croft's loyal coworker and friend; of the sweet and matronly Gaya, his wife; of Magur, Zud's deputy in Himyra; of Zud himself and others, as one thinks of people well known—actually visualizing them before my mental eye according to Croft's description—portraying their thoughts and acts and feelings to myself, as I might with any man or woman on earth.

And to me in that moment Naia—glorious in her purity and youth, waiting for her mate in the quarters of Ga—the virgin—where burned the never-dying fires of life, on the altar before Ga's feet—was far more clear in her seeming than a million mundane women, despite the billions of miles between her and my present physical estate.

Billions of miles. My mind bridged it in thought.

And Croft had bridged it in spirit at first, until at last he had learned how to cross the bridge and gain a life in the flesh—because the lure of the woman had nerved him to that test. The thing thrilled me, fired every element within me capable of responding to the stimulus of romance. Sane or insane, true or untrue, I wanted to hear the rest of the story.

Only remember—that if it wasn't Croft, his spirit—indwelling in the new patient's miserable wreck of a body—how would he have known the elements of the former story he had already mentioned—been able to pick it up where he left it off, and preface what he had promised to tell me, with his account of the actions of the Tamarizian high priest? That argument alone seemed enough to remove the last shreds of unbelief. Consequently I felt that when I entered my patient's room that evening, it would be to hear not so much a story as a narrative of life.

And at that I was to be amazed by what had happened to Jason Croft.

CHAPTER III

HARNESSED TO HEAVEN

MEANWHILE I sent him the books he had said he wanted, together with a box of good cigars. And along about eight forty-five, when I had finished my evening round of patients, I went up myself.

I lighted up a cigar and took a chair, tacitly preparing for a stay of some considerable time, and then as Croft continued to smoke in an almost meditative silence, I opened the matter myself:

"Even supposing that Zud did get at your plans, I hardly see why he should have taken the step he did before your return."

Croft nodded. "It wasn't only the plans," he said. "You must recall Abbu, the priest of the pyramid at Scira—the one who was present when I entered Jasor's body and made it my own—who administered the last rites of his church to the dying Jasor, and with whom I talked after I had succeeded in compelling the Nodhurian's form to obey my will.

"I told you that to Abbu I had acknowledged that my spirit was not Jasor's, but that what I was about to do was for Tamarizia's good, thereby enlisting his aid in my undertakings—also how he acted as an instrument in saving Naia from becoming a victim of the plan Cathur's crown prince and his Zollarian coplotters had so cunningly laid.

"At the time I swore him to secrecy, of course, and I honestly believe that up until the time I left Jasor's body for the purpose of making a final trip to earth, he was the only man who knew that the spirit within it was not the same as the one it had held at birth. "But"—a smile flicked across his lips—"just as on my first excursion to Palos I made an error and nearly precipitated myself into the fiery heart of Sirius, so I seem to have overlooked the human equation which holds on Palos no less than earth—and I overlooked also the fact that Zud was the high priest.

"Abbu, after the war with Zollaria, had been brought to Zitra and raised to a higher rank, because of his part in first assisting me. Naturally Zud was acquainted with all such facts, and one can hardly blame him for wanting to know more in view of what I can well understand were the tremendous changes I

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had brought about in Tamarizia's affairs.

"To me motors and firearms were nothing save things of every-day experience, and what I had made on Palos seemed but as crude devices at the best. But to Zud and all others they appeared little short of the miraculous, upsetting all former conceptions of their lives. Take that into consideration and then picture the impression on his mind likely to be made by the fact that by my own admission I was not the same Jasor of Nodhur who, according to the physician attending him in Scira, had there died."

I began to understand what must have happened.

"He pumped Abbu?" I exclaimed.

"Exactly." Croft smiled dryly again. "He absolved him from his oath and learned all the facts with which Abbu was acquainted. You can easily understand the rest. Jasor of Nodhur dies. His body comes back to life. Its lips speak to Abbu, the priest. He hears that a new spirit inhabits Jasor's body. Immediately after strange things—but things aimed wholly for Tamarizia's good—begin to happen.

"Shall the dead live again, save by divine intervention? Shall undreamed of things appear save by Zitu's grace? And if in addition the revivified body shall fall into strange sleeps at times and upon waking seem possessed of a supernatural knowledge, what more natural to the priest—unendowed with a full understanding of what was taking place, unaware that the things that excited his unlimited amazement were but copies of things existing on another planet—than to consider that those things he witnessed were the result of divine ordination and to regard the individual who brought them about as the mouthpiece of his god in the flesh? Oh, frankly, Murray, I don't blame that puzzled old man in the least. As a matter of fact, I blame myself for not having foreseen the effect of all that had happened on his brain."

Croft put out a hand and selected a fresh cigar. He set it alight and got it to going nicely while, as it seemed to me, he marshaled his thoughts. And then—all at once he began speaking again, and this is the story he told.

THE Palosian day—or "sun"—is twenty-seven hours long. Dawn was on the verge of breaking when Croft, having severed the astral link with his earthly body, opened Jasor of Nodhur's physical eyes in the room of the Zitran pyramid. And because now he had taken the last step which so nearly as possible must make him a Palosian indeed, and nothing held him longer on any other sphere, he opened his eyes in a flash.

One moment the body he had taken when Jasor laid it down was stretched an inanimate object on the golden couch beneath its smooth coverlet of orange silk. The next moment it was the living, breathing figure of a perfectly proportioned man, blinking its newly opened eyes.

A slightly unsteady radiance of a yellow color filled the room. It came from the blazing wicks in oil-filled sconces fixed about the walls, as Croft knew. He lay and sensed it briefly, while the tide of awakening life flowed in a tingling stream through his powerful body and limbs. And then he turned his head.

His glance fell upon one of the lay brothers of the priesthood, clad in a brown robe, from which peeped his toe-splayed, naked feet. He sat on a stool of molded copper, with down bent head. He appeared to be asleep. But suddenly as though aroused by Croft's slight movement, he jerked to attention and encountered the sleeper's eyes. Instantly he sprang erect, approaching with a soft, quick shuffle and pausing by the golden bed.

"My lord—my lord!" he stammered in little more than a husky whisper, and sank upon his knees. His back bent, his head inclined until its face was hidden. His arms rose, and as Croft watched he made the sign of the Tamarizian priesthood—a horizontal cross.

Croft lifted himself to a sitting posture on the couch, shoving the coverings back until his shoulders and torso gleamed white with a ripple of muscles beneath the yellow light. Frankly he was perplexed. Knighthood he had gained. He was a *Hupor* or Prince of Aphur by Jadgor's accolade. It was well enough for the brother to call him "lord." He was a powerful man in all the nation, but—never had he before encountered the bent knee of a priest—and since the guardian of his chamber must have known what to expect, he hardly thought the man's act attributable to fright.

"Come! Whats' the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Since you were placed to attend my awaking, why do you kneel?"

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The man lifted his face—it was white—even beyond the priestly pallor—and his eyes were wide.

"Because," he said slowly, in almost timorous fashion, "all men bend the knee to the Mouthpiece of Zitu—even Zud himself."

The whole thing burst on Croft just like that, without warning, without any premonitory sign to prepare him for his changed estate. And then, with a wildly whirling brain as he realized the far-reaching consequences hinted at by the priest's announcement, he found himself forced to accept the conclusion that the Mouthpiece of Zitu could be none other than himself. At first the thought startled him, disturbed him, appalled, and in swift succession it excited an almost resentful rage.

Those things were instinctive wholly, then as the brain, once more in the grasp of his will, began to functionate more fully, he decided that something unforeseen must have transpired while he lay here entranced, and resolved in a flash that the first step essential to a fuller information lay in an interview with Zud at once.

"Get up," he said to the priest.

"Yes, lord."

The brother rose.

"Give me my garments." Croft kicked the silken sheet completely off and stood upon his feet.

"At once." The brother shuffled toward a chest in a corner of the apartment, lifted the lid and produced a robe. Blue it was—the color of the highest order of the priesthood—embroidered on the breast in stones like drops of transparent gold. The brother brought it back, outspread across his forearms, and Croft caught sight of the design—the wings of Azil, flaring out from the stem of a cross, looped in its upper segment—the cross ansata—the Palosian symbol of immortal life. Then as the brother once more sank to his knees, holding the garment toward him, he controlled his surprise and asked a question:

"What is the meaning of this?"

When he had called for his garments he had expected his leg casings of gold, gem studded, his shirt of soft fiber, and his metal cuirass whereon blazed Aphru's sign of the sun, his sword with its jewel-incrusted hilt and belt, and his helmet with its orange plumes.

But the kneeling brother answered: "It is as Zud hath decreed."

ZUD—Zud—Zud. It seemed to Croft that Zud had, all unknown to him, been taking a very large part in his affairs. For an instant he had the distinct sensation of having in some way, he hardly knew how, been trapped. But it only hardened his determination to see the high priest at once and learn what had been going on in Zitra during the past two weeks. He took the robe from the brother's extended arms and slipped it on, fastening the shoulder boss, and seated himself while his companion laced a pair of blue-and-gold leather sandals on his feet.

"Go now," he directed, once the latter task was completed. "Say to Zud that with him I would have speech."

"I go. It was ordered that I report thy awakening, O Mouth—" the priest began as he backed toward the door.

Croft cut him short almost sharply. He lifted an arm in a sudden pointing gesture: "Go!"

The Mouthpiece of Zitu! He sat almost tensely on the edge of the couch. What in the name of Zitu did the brother mean, and what had Zud been up to? Why was he tricked out in this priestly robe with the wings of the Angel of Life, the loop of the Cross of Life on his breast? And what would be the effect of the thing on all he had planned himself?

Naia! The thought stabbed him like a knife. He lifted his eyes toward the ceiling of the room. Up there—high above him—in the quarters of the Gayana, the vestals—where burned in the shrine of Ga the never-dying fire of life—up there she was waiting for him to come back—waiting to become his bride—his mate—his complement and counterpart—for the fulfilment of their mutual love—that love which, like a lodestone, had drawn him here in the first place—to win which he had done all else.

What would be the effect of whatever it was Zud had done in his absence, on the maid herself?

It behooved him to master his startled nerves and get himself into a proper mind to dominate the coming interview with Zud. By deliberate effort, then, he forced himself back to a state of mental control. He decided to watch the high priest closely and learn, if he might, whether the man were sincere in the motives for his action or had been actuated thereto by personal or political

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desires. He relaxed the tension of his body and waited for Zud to appear, as he presently did.

He came in, an old man with graying hair, clad in an azure blue robe with the cross ansata embroidered in flame-colored jewels upon the breast. He advanced directly toward Croft as the latter rose, and some three paces before him sank slowly to his knees.

"Thou hast called, and thy servant appears, O Mouthpiece of Zitu," he said slowly in a tone of what might be reverence. "Long were we in recognizing the truth, yet was the fault not entirely our own, since only to Abbu of Scira had you voiced it, and not since Azil himself descended to teach the sons of mortals has such a thing occurred, nor in Zitu's wisdom was thy coming revealed."

In a flash Croft began to understand. The mention of Abbu's name was enough to give him the clue. He recalled his first conversation on Palos with the Cathurian priest, and the tangle began to clear.

"Thou thinkest me the Mouthpiece of Zitu, then, indeed?" he questioned the high priest, and watched him closely.

"Aye, by Zitu! the one source of life and knowledge," Zud replied. "Did not Abbu state that you told him thy spirit was not that of Jasor of Nodhur, who was dead, yet whose body having died, became once more alive, and hast thou not said that all you did was by Zitu's grace? Didst not tell me that those things you commanded to be made for Tamarizia's good were shown to you in your sleeps? Canst the spirit of a mortal enter and leave the body at will—the spirit of one such as Jasor was—and"—seemingly Zud was forgetful of all discretion in this meeting—"have I not seen the paintings of the things you plan yet to bring to Tamarizia in yonder casket?" He turned his eyes toward the golden box where Croft had left his designs.

Croft considered swiftly. Sincerity rang in the man's tones, and more and more, as he ran on, Croft understood. He decided quickly on another test. Zud had raised his eyes as he finished his answer, and Croft looked steadily into his face.

"You opened the casket?" he demanded in a louder, an accusatory voice. "You dared much, priest of Zitu. What things are to be will be in the time of Zitu's choosing. It is a brave man dares to know all things in advance."

Zud's expression changed. Before it had been one of an almost wide-eyed respect. Now it became an ashen thing of horror, of unmistakable dismay. "My lord—my lord," he faltered, "I but sought to learn the truth. I swear by Zitu that my heart was clean in what I have done and—said."

There was an odd break in his utterance just before the final word. It was as though the man were appalled at the palpable displeasure of the one before whom he knelt, yet, despite of any consequences to himself, were determined to confess.

And Croft noted his manner of speaking, and caught up that last word: "Said? You have said what, Zud?"

"That thou wert the Mouthpiece of Zitu—sent into the flesh for Tamarizia's good."

"To whom have these things been spoken?" Croft queried with a caught-in breath, sensing the calamity which had overtaken his own plans as great as it possibly could be, if things were as they now appeared.

"To all Tamarizia have I, as high priest, proclaimed it," said Zud. "Zitra but waits your awakening, that it may behold and proclaim you in the body you have chosen as your servant, and give ear to your words."

CHAPTER IV

MAN OR MOUTH?

THE thing was cut and dried. Even a public appearance was, it would seem, arranged. The church of the nation had given him forth as a spirit divinely sent as a teacher, gaining physical expression through the body of Jasor of Nodhur. And—what was Croft to do? To disclaim—to compel Zud to retract—would strike, as he knew, not only at his own powers of future accomplishment, discredit him as it were, but would aim a blow at the very foundation of the social structure, if Zud were shown to have made so terrible an error as he had. And yet—and yet—to accept—to go on—to pose as what he was not. The thought was distasteful, and worse, since to go on might mean the loss of Naia, as well as that position he had expected to hold in the newly organized republic of Tamarizian states.

For the political end of the matter he cared very little to tell the truth, but

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even the thought of Naia sent a quiver throughout his body—caused a sudden dizzy whirling of his brain. Once more he felt baffled, trapped, enraged. And so far as any escape from the situation he confronted was concerned, he could see no possible way out. For a moment a wild impulse to seize the kneeling man at his feet, lift him up and shake him, hurl against him a scorching torrent of passion-urged words for his curious meddling, assailed him. But he choked it and stood as one who considers, and when he spoke his words were once more calm:

"Enough. What things Zitu wills, those things shall be done. Yet have I a body, as thou seest, that has lain unnourished full long. Rise, Zud of Zitra. Command me food. I would eat while we talk."

"Even now it waits." Zud rose and went backward toward the door. He set it open. As Croft seated himself once more on his couch there filed in a group of brothers, the foremost bearing a short-legged table of molded copper, the others dishes and flagons in their hands.

The dishes were of gold and silver. There were goblets of glass which the Tamarizians made of magnificent quality and design. One of the latter was placed before Croft and filled with a mild and blood-red wine. Their service ended the lay brothers bent in genuflexion and retired. Zud remained standing in watchful silence until Croft bade him be seated, when he drew up a stool and sat down.

While he ate Croft plunged into a series of questions concerning affairs in the Tamarizian states.

"The reign of Tamhys will terminate in fourteen suns (days)?"

"Aye."

"Thereafter we shall adopt the new government as it was decided, the elections being held as in the choice of the former assemblies in each kingdom—each decktaron to elect a representative, by whose vote shall be the choice of president?"

"Aye." Zud inclined his head. "So has it been proclaimed."

"What candidates have been selected?"

"Jadgor of Aphur, and Tammon, Tamhys's son."

Croft considered the names as he sipped his wine. Jadgor, he knew, had, before the Zollarian war, had an eye on the Zitran throne—had hoped to mount it, and strengthen the entire nation by a change of that policy of pacifism which, by its continuation for something like fifty years, made Tamarizia weak, despite the wonderful resources in wealth and men which were hers—which would seemingly have led to her overthrow through Zollaria's arms and Cathur's defection, had not Croft appeared.

So it was not at all surprising, in view of his popularity not only in Aphur, but in Nodhur and Milidhur as well, and because of his prominent part in the war, that he should have been chosen as a candidate for the nation's first president. Nor for that matter was it to be questioned that the retiring occupant of the throne should have put up his eldest son. Of course, Croft had expected to enter the field himself, but now he brushed the point aside.

"It is well," he gave his decision and set down his glass. "And the governors of the states?"

Zud mentioned a list of names covering each former kingdom. "In Aphur Robur, Jadgor's son alone. There is no other, because of his part with you in all that has been done. In Cathur, Mutlos, a man of the people, and Koryphon, Scythys's second son, who ascended the throne, as you know, after Kyphallos fled and destroyed himself in Berla before Kalamita's eyes. As your directions were understood before the time of your recent sleeping, in Hiranur the president controls also the state affairs."

"Aye," Croft agreed. His heart had warmed at the announcement that Robur stood for election in Aphur alone. Of all its people he had known, save Naia only, he had come to love Robur best, had found him a true friend, a man of broad and intelligent mind, under each and every test. By Jadgor's own edict Robur had been his main assistant and lieutenant in all that he had done. He felt very much toward him as he might toward a younger brother. He had even discussed those periods when his body lay unconscious with the Aphurian crown prince in so far as he could, and there had been a time when the only confidante of his love for Naia had been Gaya, Robur's wife. Suddenly he felt that in these two he might find once more true friends and allies in the situation in which he found himself.

"And where is Robur?" he asked.

"In Zitra, lord. He and Lakkon and Jadgor desire speech with thee so soon as thou shalt have waked."

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A QUIVER of comprehension stirred in Croft's breast. The desire of Lakkon and Jadgor for an interview with himself he could understand. The former it was who had pledged his daughter to the Hupor Jasor, as he was then known, as wife. And Jadgor had approved of the pact. It was but natural that now they should wish some explanation at least, some understanding as to the girl's position, in view of Zud's most extraordinary proclamation. He threw up his head and stared the high priest in the eyes, and found them a trifle uncertain, his whole expression more or less puzzled, even somewhat abashed.

"What troubles you, Zud?" he inquired with the feeling that the man knew what it was really that Lakkon and Jadgor desired.

And for a moment Zud made no answer; for a moment he seemed to study Croft's face before he began in apologetic fashion: "What I have done I have done for the best, as I now call Zitu to witness; yet are there some things I do not understand."

"You refer to the maiden Naia, who by your permission was taken into the quarters of the Gayana?" An opening—an advantage appeared to Croft's mind in a flash.

And plainly his question disturbed Zud more than a little.

"Aye," he said scarcely above a whisper at length and inclined his head.

"To whom ere I slept, by consent of her father and Jadgor, I was pledged?"

"Aye, lord. Jadgor and Lakkon also ask themselves—"

"Why the Mouthpiece of Zitu should seek a union in the flesh?"

Zud clasped his hands before him. He sat with eyes downcast. By an effort, at length he once more lifted his face. "Thou hast spoken, lord," he said.

Croft held him with a level regard. "And what says Zud, the high priest?"

"That the ways of Zitu are beyond mortal understanding," Zud responded slowly.

"Yes," Croft took him up sharply. "Zud, the high priest, endeavored to understand—toward which end, though Abbu of Scira had sworn by Zitu to keep silent, he induced him to talk."

"I—I—lord, I absolved him of the oath of silence," Zud faltered, and began a nervous twisting of his interlacing fingers.

"And since when may even the high priest rescind that which Zitu has recorded?"

A tremor shook the priest. A twitching seized his face. He shrank back and sat staring, staring at the strange individual before him, with whose affairs he had dared to interfere, who now arraigned him with a face and manner gone well-nigh impersonally cold. One could no longer doubt that he had been sincere in what he had done, at least—what he had proclaimed of Croft, he himself believed. Of so much Croft felt convinced as he once more spoke:

"High priest of Zitu, in what words was your proclamation to Tamarizia concerning him until now known as the Hupor Jasor made?"

ZUD wet his lips and made answer. "It was said that Zitu had sent us a teacher—one who should reveal to all men his will, through whom he revealed his pleasure—one who was his mouthpiece indeed."

"And this you believed?"

"Aye, lord." Zud moved. He left the stool on which he was sitting. He would have knelt had not Croft stayed him:

"*Hilka!* Hold!"

"Aye, lord." Zud stood erect. His knees seemed knocking together, and he swayed. Something like pity stirred in Croft's breast. The man was overwrought, keyed to a vast tension, troubled in his mind, well-nigh dismayed. His confidence, born of years of unquestioned authority, was shaken; he appeared beaten down and crushed. And Croft was minded to maintain his advantage toward his individual ends. He spoke again: "Think you that as Zitu's Mouthpiece I shall find it easy to take my place as heretofore in the Himyra or Ladhra shops, where the instruments designed for Tamarizia's use shall be brought forth? Do men work best with one such as you would name me, or with another man, O Zud?"

"Lord, lord!" Zud bowed his head.

"Or think you that were I the mouthpiece of Zitu, I would have pledged myself to this maid save by his will? Yet today even Zud bends the knee in my presence since his proclamation. Is this thing known to the Gayana as well as to the priests?"

"Yes, it is known," Zud told him slowly.

"The maid is still there?"

"Yes."

"She has heard the truth?"

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"Yes." Zud flung up his head. Croft's last word seemed to give him courage. "She knows—the truth," he said. "She requested an audience after she had heard, and I went to her. I told her those things Abbu said."

"That my spirit was not Jasor's?" The words burst from Croft's lips in an instinctive exclamation. For an instant he felt his control once more slipping. Naia knew—that the body of the man to whom she was promised was the body of one who had died—that its life was due not to the presence of Jasor's spirit, but another. Zud had told her. He had told her the truth. Croft had meant to tell her before the marriage in so different a way from that in which the high priest must have explained. And—what must have been the effect of such an announcement upon her—what must she, could she think?

"Yes." Zud's answer but served to accentuate and confirm the dilemma his meddling had produced.

"And what said she?" Croft forced himself to ask.

"She is a maiden of spirit," said Zud in the tone of one who palliates an offense. "She is unused to restraint. She refused to give credence to Abbu's story or accept its truth save from your own lips."

Croft thrilled. Here was fidelity and trust—the absolute confidence which should exist between true mates. If Naia of Aphur had dared to refuse acceptance to the words of the high priest, she would dare much. Things might not turn out so badly as he had feared. There would seem to be time still for the true explanation he had meant to make to the girl herself. The purpose fired him to immediate determination.

"She remains with the Gayana?"

"Aye—until such time as you awaken."

"I will see her. Send one to guide me to her at once."

"Lord!" Zud's tone was aghast.

"Stop!" Croft cut short his incipient protest. "Would question my demands?"

"But the Gayana—" Zud began a faltering explanation.

His companion took a single step toward him. His jaw thrust out in an almost menacing manner, indicative of a will to brook no opposition: "May be entered by him who wears the wings of the Angel of Life as well as the high priest."

For a long, breathless instant the glances of the two men met and crossed, engaging the one with the other. And then Zud was beaten down. He yielded.

"Permit that I show you," he said, and led the way.

CHAPTER V

BEHIND THE SILVER DOOR

THEY passed from the room and along a corridor in which the oil sconces had now been extinguished, faintly illuminated by the light of the new day. Before a massive door Zud paused and set his hand to a slender cord. His action was followed by the muffled clanging of a brazen gong. He slid the door open and revealed the shadow-wrapped throat of a shaft, up which a platform presently trembled into view. It was a primitive form of elevator operated, as Croft knew, by a Mazzerian crew in the foundations of the pyramid itself, lifting and lowering it on signal, by winding its cable on and off a revolving drum.

With Zud, he stepped aboard. The platform mounted slowly up the shaft. The high priest, with a hand on an inner cord, observed its progress, and presently once more the gong far below clanged out. The platform stopped.

They stepped into a very short corridor between masonry walls of a cut and polished stone not unlike marble, save that it held a strange, translucent quality in its substance and was wholly white. The main staircase of the pyramid mounted before them and ran on toward the top, with its crowning Temple of Zitu, and just beyond it, at the far end of the corridor, was a door. Silver it was, the most precious of Palosian metals, tooled and carved into the design of a full-sized woman's figure, in whose hand was the looped cross of immortal life.

Croft thrilled as they paused before it. This was the entrance to the quarters of the Gayana. Here it was that Naia had waited for him when he plunged into the venture of the Zollarian war. Then briefly he had held her in his arms, and she had told him that none should claim her ever save himself, or, failing that, she would remain forever virgin in the sanctuary of Ga beyond this door outside which now he stood so very, very differently from what he had once thought that he should.

And suddenly the knowledge of what Zud had told her—of the shock of revela-

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tion that must have come upon her, the torment to her every finer sensibility and feeling—caused an actual sensation of constriction in Croft's chest. He stood with tight-set lips and flaring nostrils as Zud put up a hand and pressed against the left breast of the woman on the door.

There was a tiny click, and the door slid to one side, disappearing into a socket in the wall and flooding the corridor with light. No gloomy abode was that in which the vestals dwelt. High up on the pyramid, but one flight beneath the crowning temple on the truncated apex, it caught the first of Sirius's rays, and the last, through deep embrasures set with slanting glass in the structure's walls. As the door slipped aside a scene was presented to Croft's eyes, brilliant with light and life.

"Hold!" he said as Zud would have entered and stepped past him on one side.

"Wait me below in your own apartments, man of Zitu. Consider meanwhile those words we have spoken before you brought me here. Peace be with you, priest of Zitu. Go!"

Then, as Zud turned to do his bidding and regained the platform in the shaft, he stepped through the aperture of the door to the other side and paused, a trifle abashed.

He had come at a stride to a region of youth and beauty. It surrounded him on every side. Feminine forms in diaphanous fabrics were grouped about the room. The chatter of their voices filled the place. Directly before him a group of maidens already at work about an immense basket of flowers, forming the garlands and sprays which at the noontide hour of prayer they would fling at the feet of the statue of Tamarizia's god, paused and stood staring as Croft appeared.

Their hair, unrestrained save for a metal filet or cincture, fell in masses down their graceful backs. The flesh of their shoulders and arms and sandalless feet, glowed warm and pinkly white. Their lips grew parted, and their eyes, unaccustomed to masculine presence, save possibly that of old Zud, grew wide. For Croft was no ancient as he stood there in his azure robe, with the cross and the wings in gold upon his breast and his yellow hair in a tawny mass upon his head. More he was like some young and comely god himself, with his bold, strong features, his hint of latent strength.

So for a moment they stood staring until, as though her attention was arrested by their postures and the direction of their glances, an older woman appeared, coming directly toward where Croft stood, to pause before him and bend in a genuflection, and inquire with a voice leveled, as it seemed, by repression: "What does my lord of Zitu seek?"

"Speech with the maiden Naia, priestess of Ga." Croft met her glance directly.

"So be it," said the woman. "Come with me."

He followed—across a hugely pillared room where others of the vestals sat on cushions or divans, engaged in simple tasks—toward a mighty figure of a woman, carved from the strangely beautiful translucent stone the Tamarizians used mainly in their sculpture—the figure of a woman seated, brooding with a face of divinely maternal affection above the form of a babe stretched prone across her knees. Mighty, magnificent in her womanhood, beautiful in her maternity, she sat there, back of a silver altar on which leaped from an oil-fed sconce the eternal flame of life which never died.

And this he thought was Ga, to whom Naia of Aphur had prayed that she might be spared the unclean ordeal of a marriage with Cathur's prince. This was the eternal woman, the eternal mother, the eternal source—the Tamarizian virgin who had given birth to Azil, the Angel of Life. Ga—the virgin, the madonna. This was the woman and—her child—woman the shrine of the fire eternal, watching it, guarding it, replenishing it against extinction through the eons of ages within and from herself.

A SUDDEN passionate desire to do her and the members of her sex some form of honor seized him in an impulse which sent him without premeditation to his knees, bending before her majestic presence, forming the sign of the cross horizontal, beneath her brooding features; glancing up then, and then only, to meet the eyes of his guide—and find them less frigid, in a subtle manner pleased.

But she made no comment as Croft rose slowly and once more followed her lead toward the door of a room, which she unlatched and pushed aside.

Through the opening Croft's eyes leaped, to fall upon the figure of a woman, her hair as golden as the sunshine falling in a rippling, silken mass to the couch of wine-red wood on which she sat,

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her head bent above a frame in which her tapering fingers were embroidering a pattern in small, pierced jewels on a fabric of sheerest gauze.

All that in a flash. Then, as though attracted by the opening of the door, the woman glanced up, lifting a pair of pansy-purple eyes.

"Naia!" Croft's lips framed the word rather than spoke it. He stepped swiftly toward her through the door. It clicked shut behind him as the vestal closed it.

Naia, of Aphur, rose. The last vestige of color seemed drained from her face, leaving her eyes very dark in its pallor, their pupils stretched wondrously wide. So for a moment, she stood staring straight before her at him she had known as Jasor of Nodhur, before her body took on a sudden panting, so that the tissues of the temple garment she was wearing became no more than a creamy ripple above her firmly rounded busts. And then while Croft waited, choked by his own emotions, drunk in his innermost being with her beauty, she moved and sank down on her slender, supple knees.

"Beloved!" Croft went one swift pace toward her. He stretched out his hands. "Naia—mine own—arise."

She glanced up. A quiver shook the perfect curve of her mouth. And then for the first time her lips writhed open. "How speaks the Mouthpiece of Zitu in a lover's guise?"

"Arise," repeated Croft, and waiting until she had once more regained her feet before he went on: "Were I to answer your question, beloved, would any hear?"

She regarded him strangely. It was almost as though she sensed some new, some unsuspected meaning in his words, some hint of something of which she had not dreamed, yet which, now that her intuition gave it seeming, she desired to have made plain. "No," she made answer slowly. "This is my own apartment—set aside for my use for such time as I remain with the Gayana. What things may be said within it shall remain unknown."

"Then—" In a single stride Croft approached her. He swept her into his arms. They closed about her with an almost yearning gesture. He drew her to him, held her against his breast. The warmth of her, the glorious litheness, the pliant softness of her figure, struck against his own. He gloried in it, thrilled in every cell to the sudden contact—to the quick, instinctive tremor which shook her form. "Hark ye, beloved," he cried softly into the shell-pink ear beneath his lips. "Hark ye—mark well my answer. The Mouthpiece of Zitu is no supernatural being, but a man and a lover—thy lover in very truth."

And on the word the supple body of the woman went tense inside his arms. It struggled, it writhed. It struck its hands against his breast and pushed back her torso, straining, bending it against his restraining hold from the hips. Its face became convulsed, a panting, lip-parted, eye-wide mask of horror. With a final effort Naia tore herself free. Hot words poured from her mouth as she choked and gasped for breath.

"Then—in the name of Zitu—what do you here—with that—that"—she lifted a naked arm and pointed—"with the wings of Azil—the looped cross of Ga—upon your breast?"

"Is not Zud a man—and wears he not the cross at least—and comes he not among the Gayana at will?" stammered Croft, more disturbed than he cared to admit at her manner and words.

And as he paused she blazed out in a fashion of almost scathing contempt. "A man, yes, is Zud—one in whom the flame of life burns low, who comes thither only when the work of him he serves demands it; who speaks, when he comes, naught but what to him seems truth."

Croft instinctively flinched. Her allusion to what he felt she considered his own deceit in regard to himself flicked him despite his own knowledge of his own sincerity in all that he had done. The sensation which gripped him was due to no sense of guilt, but was more a poignant regret that she should have been led to consider him in any way false to the holiest emotions of his life.

"WHAT *seems* truth, aye," he rejoined, therefore quickly holding Naia's eyes, from which flashed what seemed a purple fire, with his own. "Yet what man shall know the mind of Zitu, save as by his own interpretation, or be free from error in his words at times, even though years should have taught him discretion in his tongue?"

Naia's lip curled. As Zud had said, hers was a haughty spirit—one not prone to break or yield as a weaker might have done. And now she refused to give ground in her position even with this man to whom she had given her love in the past—had stood ready to yield her-

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self in every way the word implied. "At least," said she, "Zud makes no claim of being any other than he is."

"Nor do I." Croft drew himself up. He seized what appeared to him an opportunity for arresting her sense of justice, which past experience had taught him was true and fair if once it were reached. "Have I claimed ever to be aught save a man who loved thee? Was it I or Zud who named me Mouthpiece of Zitu while

"Naia, my beloved—hold," Croft told the lovely astral form beside his own. "Return again to your body. Go back."

I slept, or by whose orders, when I asked for clothing, was given me this priestly dress? Has Jasor of Nodhur ever in the past sought any greater exaltation in rank or fame or power than that alone which would bring him to your side? Have his spirit, his lips sought ever to call out to any other save to thee alone? Have not his arms fought ever those enemies who were thine because of his love for Naia of Aphur—to keep her country safe, herself from the pollution of other arms less clean?"

And now for the first time it seemed that the Princess Naia faltered. Some of the tension went out of her graceful figure. Doubt crept into her eyes. "You—you," she asked a broken question, "would have me believe the Mouthpiece of Zitu, a—man?"

"Yes—as he is—a man who loves you as none ever loved you before." Croft threw out his arms. "Seem I not a man to you, Naia of Aphur—maid of gold—who have willingly lain in my arms, yielded me your lips—before this—who stand here

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now in the quarters of the Gayana, pledged to me by Lakkon—as well as by yourself. Is a man any less a man because he wears the garments of a priest?"

"Hold, in Zitu's name!" Abruptly a tremor, a shudder shook the slender, half-veiled form he watched. "Man, though he be a priest, is sworn to chastity in Zitu's sight. Yet you, whom Zud names the Mouthpiece of Zitu—"

"Am sworn to love you, beloved," Croft cut her protest short.

"Love?" Terror woke in Naia's face. She drew back. "Would seek to compel me with your newly acknowledged power? So long as Zud named you a spirit, I was ready to bend before you. But now that you name yourself a man, would seek to lead me into sin, even were I minded to give heed to your plea?"

"Nay," said Croft in a softer voice. "Nay, Naia, woman of my soul—whom Zitu himself decreed in the beginning to be my mate. For love such as mine is no sin, but the law of Zitu himself—the cause of all living—all life. Yet, save you yield yourself to me of your own will, those things my spirit cries for shall not be. And—can I not convince you that, despite the words of Zud, which were ill advised, I am no more than him to whom you gave your promise—than are you—free?"

He broke off and for the first time bowed his head. Something like despair seized upon him—a sick wave of discouraged purpose, as he realized how fully the leaven of the high priest's revelations had been at work—as he sensed that the very union she had confessed to him in the past she herself desired, had come to appear now a breaking of the law—a union unnatural—unsanctioned by the God of her religion—a sacrilegious thing.

And as he stood there a change came over the girl who watched. For the first time in her knowledge of him Jasor of Nodhur bent his unflinching crest; for the first time a hopeless something weakened the lines of his strongly commanding face. And only one who knows the hearts of women may tell what things stirred that moment in her breast. She moved. Step by step she approached him where he stood. In an almost timid fashion she lifted a bared arm and laid her hand against his chest.

"But," she faltered, "Abbu said—"

"What?" Croft did not alter his position.

"Those things which sent my spirit down to the dark world of Zitemku, ruler of the lost souls, in surprised dismay—that made me tremble as with cold—that sent me to kneel before Ga for hours that, being a woman and knowing women, she might help me to understand—that—that the spirit which dwelt in Jasor of Nodhur's body was not his own, but another's—sent by Zitu to possess it—when Jasor—died." The last was a quivering whisper, no more than a sibilant breath.

"And if what Abbu said were truth?" Croft lifted his somber visage and looked down into her darkly tragic eyes. Twin pools of mental agony, they seemed, very close beneath his face—and Naia of Aphur's flesh on cheek and throat and scarce-veiled bosom gleamed bloodless, pallid. Even her parted lips were white.

"If?" they questioned as he paused. "Think you that, right or wrong in Zitu's sight, I myself could mate with you were it the truth—couldst give myself to the embrace of a body filled by another than that spirit Zitu breathed into it at birth; think you my flesh would not shrink in very horror from the contact, my spirit rebel, nor force my flesh to yield? And were Abbu's tale true, then, too, were the high priest right. For how might such a thing transpire save by the will of Zitu himself—how else the body of a man who had given up the spirit return to life?"

"I HAVE told you," said Croft, "that those things I did were done by Zitu's grace. But I have not explained my full meaning. That I had reserved for another time, and for your ears alone. Yet I swear now by Zitu and Ga and Azil that I meant in my heart to tell you all things before I claimed you as my wife—make all things plain."

"Then—" Once more Naia's figure stiffened. One hand crept up and lay pressed in above her heart. "Abbu said truth—your spirit is not Jasor's, but another's?"

"Yes," said Croft, dully refusing further evasion, "Abbu said the truth. Yet not all the truth, and Zud overshot the mark in his interpretation." He paused.

For the figure before him had risen, stretching upward on the balls of its rosy feet, lifting its arms in a high-flung gesture with fingers outstretched, extending, as it seemed, in every line of its slender, rounded length, with head back-tilted until its golden hair hung halfway down its tapering thighs in a shimmering cascade, its face raised, its lips

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parted, its eyes half closed. So sudden was the change that the girl's form seemed to have flung itself into that strange posture of abandonment to woe, as a stricken creature leaps in its death throes when struck by the hunter's shaft. And as Croft broke off, arrested by that tragic and yet still beautiful pose, a scream came out from the round, soft pillar of Naia of Aphur's throat.

"Zitu! Ga! Befriend me!"

All life went out of her glorious body. It sank down, seemed to shrink, to bend and sway before him like a tempest-riven reed.

Croft caught it as it fell and lifted it in his arms—lifted it and held it, the dearest burden they had ever known—held it and bent above it with sick despair in his heart, despair for her whom he held, whose pliant glory now lay impotently unconscious, upborne, saved from the injury of its fall by his strong and reverent hands—despair for her and for himself—for them both—victims of Zud's curious meddling in their affairs.

Zud! He ground his teeth together. He was not done with Tamarizia's high priest. Zud—or another—or ten thousand others—must pay for this. Something like a sob caught in his throat as he gazed at the down-dropped lids above those pansy-purple eyes in which Zud's interference had waked the look of horror they had held before they closed.

The sound of a muffled groan escaped his lips. How different was this meeting from the one he had planned as taking place. Then, too, he had thought to hold her in his arms, but that she would lie there willing, gladly, responsive in her inmost being to his presence, not like this. And suddenly moved again by a strange impulse, because Zitu or God—what mattered it as to name, since, by any name whatever, there was for life but one source?—he lifted that splendid form and held it stretched prone and motionless before him, extended face uppermost across his powerful arms. And—

"Ga befriend her. Zitu befriend me. Azil have compassion upon us both!" he cried before he laid her on the couch of wine-red wood.

For a long moment after he had straightened, he stood gazing down upon her. The sun streaming into the room through the glass of an embrasure struck out the golden design of the wings and cross upon his breast. It sparkled, shimmered, as it rose and fell with his breathing. But it was no more golden, no more shimmering than the flood of golden hair about Naia of Aphur's head. Nor was Croft's robe more blue in its jewel-wrought folds than the limpid eyes beneath her fallen, long-lashed lids.

Of a sudden Croft's own eyes fired with purpose. He drew a sharp, deep breath. Naia of Aphur was his no longer. But—as Mouthpiece of Zitu—all men must obey his mandates; there would be no exception; not even the high priest himself, and—if he were to be cheated of the major object for which he had labored, to attain which he had finally broken the last bond between himself and earth—then let all men beware. He turned away to go in search of Zud.

CHAPTER VI

CROFT DECIDES

AND, now, despite all these things, despite the scene in the room of the Gayana, the shock of surprise attendant upon his waking—the first startled comprehension of what had happened wearing off ever so slightly, Croft's future course became to him more clear.

Since the commanding part remained to him yet, it was his to command, not to question or advise. He stalked across the sunlighted vastness of the region of the Gayanas where the chatter of the maidens sank to silence as he passed, bade the vestal who had taken him to Naia send some of the women to attend her and passed through the silver door.

Stern of lip, utterly composed in outward seeming once more, giving no outward sign of the tempest of black despair, of heart-sick and baffled yearning which raged within him, he made his way down three of the angling flights of the pyramid stairs and flung back into its masonry sockets the high priest's door.

Never perhaps in the history of the nation has so unceremonious an entrance of those chambers in the sacred structure been made. Yet Croft had deliberately planned on the effect and a quiver of satisfaction filled him, as Zud, seated at a table of the wine-red wood so much used for furnishings in Tamarizia, refreshing himself with some cakes of beaten grain and wine, and fruit, glanced up sharply with an expression of surprised resentment and then started to his feet.

"Sit, man of Zitu," he directed bruskly,

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and watched the high priest comply as he himself advanced and occupied a richly upholstered couch close to where Zud sat. Then as the priest dipped his hands into a crystal bowl of water and dried them on a square of cloth reserved for the purpose, he went on. "It were well to consider the form of this proclamation concerning the Mouthpiece of Zitu, I think."

Zud eyed him. Plainly the high priest was ill at ease. Croft's whole manner had altered strangely since he had left him at the door of the Gayana, and he must have sensed it. The thing was in his intonation, the settled lines of his face, his eyes. "I—give ear, lord," he began, after a momentary pause. "What suggestions are there—"

"Suggestions?" The Mouthpiece of Zitu caught the last word from his mouth. "Think you that I shall offer suggestions, priest of Zitu? Does Zitu suggest when he speaks?"

"Nay." Zud's expression grew troubled. "Hold not my words against me, lord. I seek not thy displeasure. Yours is the speaking, mine it is to—obey."

"That is well," said Croft in a milder voice. "Listen then, Zud. It is my will that neither you, nor the brothers of the priesthood, nor any other man in Tamarizia, bend the knee to me again. Render unto Zitu that obeisance as heretofore—to Ga and Azil—not to me. Those things are of the spirit, Zud, not of the flesh. In Tamarizia after fourteen days men walk equal in Zitu's sight. Let thy word go forth to this effect."

A tremor shook the high priest's hand as he stretched it forth. "I hear and obey, O lord; yet was it to thy spirit the knee was bent, not to Jasor of Nodhur's flesh."

"My spirit is what Zitu by his grace has made it," Croft returned. "What I am lies between me and Zitu himself."

"Yet how then shall the Mouthpiece of Zitu be proclaimed?" Zud quavered. Suddenly, despite his priestly trappings, the sumptuous quarters in which he sat, he seemed no more than a shaken old man.

"It is of that I would give you counsel," Croft replied. "Where I minded I could forbid this proclamation altogether, Zud, and compel you to hang your head, admitting that you had meddled to bring about those things Zitu had not ordained. Think you he needs any man's assistance in working out his plan? Yet because I have watched closely since I awakened, and find your act inspired by no evil intent, but by lack of understanding, because to discredit your words were to strike not only thee, but at the very foundation itself of each man's belief, I am minded to let what you have decreed take place.

"You shall proclaim me thus. Not as a spirit, but as a man, a teacher, one to whom Zitu permits certain things to be known; one by whom the welfare of the nation is considered, through whom shall be given to Tamarizia's people much for their own good; through whom those things Zitu permits for them shall be transmitted to them, and in so much Zitu's mouthpiece still." Abruptly he broke off as a sudden conception seized him. For a time he considered a startlingly daring plan before he spoke again in a tone of musing: "Zud—Zud, if you only know the truth."

"The truth, O lord!" said the high priest slowly. "Have I not sought it all my life?"

Croft nodded. "Aye, priest of Zitu, I think you have. Wouldst hear the truth of those things Abbu told you from my mouth?"

Zud leaned forward somewhat quickly. For an instant an eager light gleamed in his eyes before they met Croft's steadily watching, and then wavered.

"Lord!" he faltered, "lord!"

Croft told him the tale.

For that was the plan which had filled his mind—to tell it; to narrate to Zud the truth; to explain those things which had been done, and the how of each act so fully as he could inside the other's comprehension, to convince him by word of mouth if he might, or, failing that, to win his consent to a practical test.

WHILE he talked time dragged on, and by degrees Zud relaxed his pose of something like overborne embarrassment.

His attitude now became that of an amazed and eager attention. His eyes lighted and his breathing quickened, and now and then he moistened his lips with his tongue. By degrees his excitement increased, until he was gripping the arms of his chair and leaning toward Croft, in a posture which seemed no more than physical reflex of his mental determination to miss no single word.

"Thou—thou sayest a man may leave his body at will?" he stammered as Croft paused.

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"Yes, if he knows the method of controlling his spirit to affect his object," Croft replied.

"May go to other places while his body remains where he leaves it—and see and know, and return again?" Zud said. His eagerness struck Croft as almost pathetic. It was like that of a child.

"Yes," he repeated again.

"It is hard to believe," said Zud.

"Would you like to have proof?" Croft decided to convince the high priest now and at once.

"Proof?" Zud queried.

"Yes. Would you like to leave this body of yours, Zud of Zitra, under my direction, learn I have spoken the truth?"

His words were followed by a widening of the high priest's eyes. In them waked something like a startled desire, combined with a cautious hesitation. His whole expression was that of one who falters on the brink of the unknown, longing to dare it yet deterred by the very fact that it *is* the unknown.

"Thou canst bring that about?" he questioned at length.

"Yes, if you obey me wholly." Croft held him with a steady regard. To him that which he meant to do was no more than play. To cast this old man into a cataleptic sleep by his own consent and project his astral consciousness, whither he willed, was naught for one who by his own volition had spanned the gap of interstellar space. Yet to Zud the venture seemed to appear very vast, and he hesitated yet a moment briefly before:

"My obedience is yours, O lord," he gasped.

"Then," said Croft, summoning all the powers of his trained will to his aid, "fasten thy eyes on me, O man of Zitu, and fix thy mind on sleep, for this leaving of the body begins indeed with a something approaching sleep in its nature. Think therefore of sleep, O Zud—of sleep, of only sleep!"

Fastening his gaze upon him in complete attention, until by degrees his lids, at first wide, began to droop above his eyes, Zud obeyed.

"So then," Croft droned on as he noted the change, "your eyes are closing, Zud; the lids grow heavy; sleep creeps now upon thee; sleep, a deep sleep. Zud, thou art asleep, yet sleeping thou canst hear my voice. Speak I not the truth?"

"Aye"—a muffled murmur from the high priest's mouth.

"And hearing me, Zud, even in your sleep you will render obedience to my words. Hence, listen closely and obey. Do you know where Lakkon and Jadgor and Robur lodge?"

"Aye," quavered the high priest.

"Then shall you go there, Zud, on my command. In the name of Zitu I command you to leave your body—now."

For a moment he gave over speaking and waited while the form of the high priest relaxed and sagged down in the chair of ruddy wood. Then abruptly he resumed:

"Have obeyed me, Zud?"

"Aye," no more than a whisper from the lips of the body in the chair.

"What do you see?" Croft demanded.

"A strange sight, indeed. My own form, as in a reflecting water-pool, seated with downcast head, as wrapped in sleep."

"'Tis well," Croft spoke in answer and direction. "Await my company, Zud." He threw himself prone upon the couch and freed his own astral shell from Jasor's body by the effort of his will. An instant later he floated midway between the floor and ceiling at Zud's side. Below them, sat and reclined each body. There stood the table, still bearing food for the material body midway between couch and chair. Croft turned to his companion. And now all communication was on the astral plane, without sound, yet by a none less evident diffusion of conscious vibration.

"Thou seest?" he queried with a smile.

"Aye," the answer came to him from Zud's wraith—that strange replica of his earthly form, implacable, invisible to any save Croft's and his own eyes, which hung there between the floor of the apartment and the burnished roof, weaving to and fro, in each intangibe current of the air, swaying and billowing, like a wind-stirred effigy in smoke. "Aye, lord, I see, and am filled with amazement."

"Thou seest but the first step as yet," Croft told him. "Come!"

THERE was an open embrasure in the pyramid wall. Through it Croft willed himself, and seizing the thin arm of the weird form beside him, dragged it along. They shot out and up through a sun-filled air—out and up and up. The pyramid lay beneath them, the snow-white temple of Zitu glinting in dazzling fashion on its top. East, west, north and south Zitra lay spread to their sight, with its houses, its palaces and hovels, the ringing cir-

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cumference of its mighty walls. Its harbor studded with sails was all asparkle in the sunlight, and beyond that the bosom of the central ocean rose and fell slowly like the breast of a woman asleep.

"Lord! Lord!" Croft sensed that the high priest gasped again in his emotions at least.

"Behold!" Croft returned and swept an arm in the gesture of a circle. "Priest of Zitu, behold! And, now, in which direction do the men I mentioned lodge?"

"In the palace of Tamhys himself, as his guests," Zud replied, and pointed with a spectral arm.

"Will thyself to their presence, even as you were in the flesh. Think only that you desire immediate nearness to them. So shall you come upon them, Zud."

"Aye, lord," Zud knit his astral brows as though in mental effort.

The sunlight vanished in a flash. With it went out the far-flung view of the Tamarizian landscape—the city, the waves of the central sea. Suddenly vast walls appeared on every hand—a tesselated floor inlaid in white and gold and silver, stretched out beneath a roof of silver inlaid beams, supporting frames containing varicolored glass.

This was the interior court of the Zitran palace as Croft knew. It swept past quickly. He had the impression of the balcony surrounding it on all four sides in Tamarizian style, of the supporting arches, of the groups of statuary between them, of the ascending stairways, and then they vanished, too, and he found himself in a smaller apartment, its sliding doorway covered by a scarlet curtain, its floor in part concealed by gorgeous rugs, its windows draped with other scarlet tissues through which the outer light shone redly—a room equipped with couches and chairs and tables, adorned between the doors and windows with frescoes and groups of sculpture done in the customary translucent stone, and supported on pedestals of copper, silver and gold. So much he saw at a glance before he fastened his attention on the figures of three men grouped about a table in front of a scarlet-curtained window in the outer end of the room.

These men he knew, had met and known and conversed with before this in the flesh. Jadgor, of Aphur, heavy set, dark of eyes and complexion, grizzled of hair, his nose high and somewhat bent in the middle, his whole appearance that of a man of driving purpose, sat there now clad in leg cases, shirt and metal cuirass, with Aphur's rayed sun on his breast. And close beside him on the table reposed his helmet with its nodding scarlet plumes.

Opposite him sat Lakkon, noble of Aphur and adviser to the king, heavy set like his brother-in-law, strong of feature, with iron-gray poll, dressed like to Jadgor in every essential detail, though in a fashion less royal. By the end of the table stood Robur, Jadgor's son, clean-limbed, strong-featured, with well-formed jaw and mouth, about which lurked often a hint of humor, as Croft knew. In a fleeting glance he recognized its absence now. The face of the crown prince was set into almost stubborn lines, its cheeks a trifle flushed.

And even as Croft perceived the attitude and expression of the several occupants of the apartment, Jadgor hit the table with one fist a resounding crash, whose vibration eddied out and set Zud to drunkenly rocking in their whorl close by Croft's side.

"By Zitu, and by Zitu!" He swore a double oath. "I like not this delay in an understanding. Thrice in as many days have we visited the pyramid, and Zud has said he sleeps. Much has he done for Tamarizia, as I shall last deny; nor did he tell us to remain in Zitra at the last. Yet if Zud be right, as he should, being high priest, my brother, Lakkon, finds himself in difficult case."

LAKKON'S visage darkened. "Yet was the pledge given of his seeking," he broke out in querulous fashion. "Jadgor knows that Jasor, be he spirit, as Zud saith, or man, sought it of me ere he entered the armored car to lead into the conflict wherein Helmor, of Zollaria, was overthrown. And Jadgor himself did sponsor my words wherein Naia, my daughter, was promised him to wife. Wherefore, she hath permitted his arms, and yielded him her mouth, as none save an unclean woman doth to any save the men of her own family or him to whom she is betrothed."

"Aye," said Jadgor, frowning. "Yet shall a spirit mate with the flesh. Continence is no less a vow of the priesthood than of the Gayana. Were a spirit sent by Zitu to do his work, even though to that end he employs the body of one whom Azil has recalled, is he to be considered as man or priest?"

"Think you Zitu wouldst choose a re-

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bellious spirit for his mouthpiece?" Robur broke in with considerable heat. "Jadgor, my father, who are we to judge?"

"Robur seems minded to attempt it," Jadgor rejoined with a sarcasm he plainly did not wish to conceal.

"Aye." The color deepened in the crown prince's cheeks. "For by Jadgor's command I labored beside this Jasor, of Nodhur, as he then was known, for the better part of a cycle, toward the end of making Tamarizia safe against what Helmor did intend, and in nothing did I find him other save steadfast and just. Man he was in every seeming, save that his knowledge surpassed the knowledge of all other men, and for these sleeps such as holds him now. We became as brothers in our common purpose, whereby Jadgor now bids fair to attain his ends."

Croft's heart warmed swiftly to Robur's defense, though it was no more than from his knowledge of the crown prince he had felt he might expect. As Robur said the bond between them in their year of mutual endeavor in the shops of Himyra and Ladhra, where the motors and rifles used in the war were made, had become exceedingly close. Indeed, so intimate had they grown that he had addressed Robur as "Bob."

They had been as brothers, indeed, and he felt new confidence now, knowing Gaya would reflect the attitude of her husband rather than any one else. And Gaya in the past had been at one time the means of communication between Naia and himself, when Lakkon had felt himself bound by a pledge to Cathur, to discourage Croft's suit. Now, therefore, he waited eagerly to see what response Jadgor might make to his son's final sentence which was no more than an allusion to those plans of mounting the Zitran throne that had held Jadgor's mind when Croft came to Palos first, toward which, by a marriage with Cathur's profligate prince, Naia was to aid.

And that Jadgor sensed the half-veiled rebuke, he saw at once, since the Aphurian's frown but deepened before he spoke. "Man in seeming is he, I admit, yet to Abbu he confessed that he was not Jasor but another. This thing I do not understand, nor doth Zud. Yet were he an agent of Zitu, then were the end of which you speak of Zitu's willing for Tamarizia's good, which, as my son knows, lies nearest Jadgor's heart. Zud, as you know also, I have questioned, and he holds that none save a mortal may know a woman, save only by Zitu's will, as Azil was conceived of Ga."

"Then why question Zitu's will, as expressed by Zitu's Mouthpiece?" said Robur quickly, and paused with a gasp.

"What mean you?" Jadgor half rose from his seat.

"Nay—" Suddenly Robur faltered, he seemed disturbed, abashed. He lowered his eyes. "Nay, my father, I spoke in haste. What says the maiden herself? Did not my uncle speak with her the prior sun?"

"She holds to her promise as she has held since the beginning," Jadgor replied. "She refuses to leave the Gayana until she has speech with the sleeper himself."

"Nor will she leave ever, should Abbu's words and Zud's judgment prove true," Lakkon said with a twitching face. "Virgin is she in all save the love she has given to him she knew as Jasor. Failing its consummation, she becomes Gayana herself."

"Nay, by Zitu!" Robur cried a savage protest. "My father and uncle, of this thing there lies some explanation. He who I, too, knew as Jasor, won not the full love of my cousin for any such sterile fate. Himself, he told me that all he did was by Zitu's grace; and of *all* that he did was not this too a part?"

A part—rather the all—the motive, the object of what he had done, thought Croft, as he once more thrilled to the sturdy, unyielding quality of Robur's partizanship.

Then as Jadgor made no immediate answer, and Lakkon sat with troubled countenance, lost as it appeared in the prospective fate of the daughter whom he loved with an almost adoring devotion, and now saw embrace the life of a vestal as escape from what, by Tamarizian custom, must otherwise amount to a technical disgrace, Robur went on. "Wherefore, as said before, who are we to judge the Hupor Jasor or the Mouthpiece of Zitu, be he what he may, ere he awakes? Like to my cousin, Naia, I would ask him to speak for himself."

Jadgor gave him a glance. "For that waking we have waited many suns."

"Yet, perhaps he wakes even now," Lakkon suggested quickly, his manner that of a man who grasps at straws.

"Aye," said Jadgor, "perhaps. And—since we are met for the purpose, rather than useless discussion, let us seek the

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pyramid at once. He rose, a commanding figure in his glistening cuirass and moved toward the curtained door.

"Back!" Croft commanded Zud. "Desire the return to thy body."

He suited his own act to the word, and an instant later opened his physical eyes to find Zud sitting tensely erect, regarding him out of staring, startled eyes.

He sat up. "You saw, O Zud," he questioned. "You heard?"

"Aye," said Zud a trifle hoarsely. "This passes understanding."

"Only until understood," Croft told him. "Art any less yourself for having left your flesh?"

Zud dropped his eyes. "Nay, not so," he said at last.

"And had you entered this body upon the couch, rather than that in the chair?" Croft pressed him closely. "Think you, Zud, you would have been any less yourself, any less Zud, the—priest of Zitu, and—a *man?*"

"Zitu!" Zud breathed sharply. Plainly he caught Croft's drift. "In such a fashion then you have visited other places, even to the stars, and seen strange things, and brought back what you deemed good?"

"Aye," said Croft with a smile. "In the spirit, Zud, you have seen your body lie sleeping, even as in the flesh you have seen my body lie. Yet are you Zud in the spirit or in the flesh; for with each man it is the spirit commands the flesh; that acts, and the spirit, Zud of Zitra, is of Zitu, breathed from his nostrils, into the flesh, to give the body life."

"Man then is a spirit?" Zud began slowly. He seemed shaken, yet in some subtle way exalted, despite the fact that he was pallid to the lips.

"Aye, Zud, priest of Zitu. There were no man else."

A rap fell on the door of the apartment. It slid back, revealing a lay brother in bare feet and cord-belted robe. He advanced, bending before Zud from the waist, his arms extended in the sign of the horizontal cross.

"Jadgor of Aphur, and Lakkon, and Robur, son of Jadgor, await audience with Zud of Zitra," he announced.

"Admit them," Zud glanced at Croft as the brother withdrew. "Thou art as thou hast said, a teacher not only of all men, but of Zitu's priest. I would speak with thee more of this."

For the second time the door slid back. Jadgor, Lakkon, and Robur filed in.

CHAPTER VII

FATHER AND SON

"GREETING, priest of Zitu," Jadgor began, catching sight of the other occupant of the room, and paused briefly before he went on:

"*Hai,* Hupor, so you are awake again at last."

"As Jadgor sees," said Croft without rising, while Lakkon stared and Robur took a quick step forward, flushed deeply and checked his instinctive motion, as one who hesitates in a decision.

Toward him Croft put out a hand, and as Robur caught it with a sudden gesture, he smiled. "Zud tells me you stand without opposition in Aphur, Rob," he resumed as he gripped the Tamarizian's fingers. "Of such things I am glad."

"It was to inquire of you, we have intruded upon the priest of Zitra," Jadgor spoke again before Robur could do more than return Croft's grip. "Concerning thee a proclamation has gone forth, Mouthpiece of Zitu, thou art acclaimed. How then shall we salute thee in the future?" His tone was haughty, harmonizing with the attitude of mind Croft had sensed in the room in Tamhys's palace. But he paid it the tribute of small notice.

"Salute me," he said almost coldly, "as Zud has ordained."

"Thou art from Zitu then?" Jadgor lost a modicum of his aplomb. Man of action, accustomed to command though he was, yet, like most of his nation, he stood in awe of his nation's god—and Croft's answer gave him pause.

"All men are of Zitu, Jadgor of Aphur," Croft replied, meaning in his response to do the presidential candidate small good.

But as he paused: "Truth is being spoken," Robur cut quickly in. "All men are of Zitu through Azil and Ga, until Zitu himself sends Zilla, with his sucking lips to take his life away."

Once more Croft smiled into the eyes of his friend. "Then gentle Gaya—she is happy at your popularity, Rob?" he inquired as Jadgor stood and stared.

"She waits me at Himyra," Robur returned, inclining his head. "But—there were reasons why I desired more to remain in Zitra until such time as should find you awakened from your sleep."

"Oh, aye—such reasons as Jadgor's doubt, and Lakkon's questions concerning Zud's proclamation." Croft yawned

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as he spoke. "But Robur forgets not so quickly his friends."

"By Zitu! How say you?" Jadgor broke out in a roar, flicked as it seemed to dare the question by Croft's manner and words. "Are you spirit or man?"

Croft eyed him for what seemed a long time before he answered. "A man—in the way you mean it, O Jadgor—a man as thou art."

"Hai!" In a fashion Jadgor seemed surprised. "Then how the Mouthpiece—" he began.

Croft rose. The cross and the wings of Azil glowed yellow in a ray of sunlight on his breast. His tone was that of a teacher to a child. "Jadgor of Aphur," he spoke with deliberation, each accent falling slowly, "the Mouthpiece is that which speaks from knowledge to him who has less—hence is the teacher a mouthpiece of knowledge to the student. Those things which are difficult to one of little knowledge may appear but simple to the mind of one who understands."

Color crept into Jadgor's dark face. One would have said Croft's speech had lashed his haughty spirit like a whip to a gnuppa's flank. His eyes came up and he measured glances with the man before him. "And," said he a trifle quickly, "as Mouthpiece of Zitu, you claim the greater knowledge for yourself? Perchance it were but a short step in your belief between the greater knowledge and the greater power. But—Tamarizia is not yet within the full grasp of your hand, and Aphur still is Aphur, and with Nodhur and Milidhur, strong."

"My father!" Robur's tone was one of consternation. He took a quick step in Jadgor's direction.

"Hold, Rob!" Croft lifted a restraining hand. It came into his mind that the greater power of which Jadgor spoke was after all the main point that was troubling the Aphurian king—that he feared a loss of that prestige even as president, which all his life he had known—was alarmed lest Croft with the backing of the priesthood gain the upper hand, and Zud step into the position of sponsor for the stranger which until now he himself had held with great honor to himself and his son. He let an icy smile grow slowly on his lips. "Aye, Milidhur and Nodhur and Aphur are strong. Aphur's king, through me. Also, is Tamarizia yet an empire. Wherefore the change of government is by Tamhys' decree. Let Jadgor beware lest success and quick attainment of his wishes may turn his head."

"*Hai!* You would threaten!" Jadgor exclaimed, drawing himself up to his full height.

"Hold!" commanded Zud, breaking in for the first time. "Jadgor of Himyra, you forget yourself, and the obedience all men owe to Zitu—and the victory granted Tamarizia by his grace. What is the strength of Aphur or Nodhur or Milidhur, to his designs? And think you that any or all of those states will follow you against the word of Zitu's priest?"

"Or," Croft caught up the subject, well pleased by Zud's stand in the matter, "think you that I who gave the strength of which you boast, have not greater strength to give, or should the need arise to use against that already given? If so, ask Zud, who has seen somewhat of my plans."

BUT JADGOR was stubborn, and years of authority had made it hard for one of his type to yield. "Strength you may have," he retorted shortly, "yet where shall it be produced in time to avail against Aphur's strength? And if not in time, where produced at all, were Tamarizia still an empire with Jadgor on the throne?" His eyes flashed sharply and he laid a hand on the gem-studded hilt of his sword.

"Hold!" cried Zud once more, while Robur paled and Lakkon drew instinctively back from his king. "Thy words approach treason, Jadgor, should they come to Tamhys's ears. As priest of Zitu I command you to yield obedience to the Mouthpiece of Zitu—to aid, not oppose his intent."

Jadgor was heated beyond all cool judgment. He flung back his head. "Mouthpiece of Zitu—or of Zitemku, the foul one—or man as he himself alleges, Jadgor yields authority to no one!" he roared.

"Nor hesitated to offer his sister's child to a profligate prince, turned traitor to his land in order to increase it," said Croft as the Aphurian paused.

"The point is well taken," Jadgor returned, breathing deeply inside his metal cuirass, "since the maid was almost asked by the Mouthpiece of Zitu himself as a price."

"No," Croft denied with a greater show of emotion than he had exhibited as yet. "I asked but your consent and that of her father to win her for my wife if I could."

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"He speaks truth, my father," Robur declared. "And—I myself know that Naia, my cousin, loved Jasor of Nodhur as no other."

"Jasor," Lakkon spoke for the first time. "But Naia herself has told me that Abbu of Scira said—"

"That Jasor's spirit was drawn from his lips by Zilla," Jadgor interrupted. "How say you, Robur—think you your cousin desires marriage with a body whose spirit has fled?"

"No," said Croft, speaking before Robur could find any answer. "Naia of Aphur is free from any claim of mine, save as she herself decides when she learns the truth."

"Thou hast—seen her?" Lakkon faltered, his face beginning to work.

"Yes—and told her the truth as I meant to tell it to her, save that Abbu spoke to Zud in the time of my sleep and Zud spoke to the maid without a full understanding of all the truth embraced."

"The truth—what is it? Is it true that your spirit is not Jasor's?" Jadgor once more broke forth.

"Aye—my spirit is not Jasor's," Croft returned. "To Zud I have explained it. Yet is my spirit the spirit of a man born of a woman as any other though not on Palos nor into Jasor's flesh."

"Zitu!" Jadgor was plainly startled. "Can a man's spirit forsake his body and enter another, and yet possess mortal life?"

"Aye," said Zud, whose single experience, as Croft had meant, seemed to have filled him with complete conviction. "I myself have left my flesh and returned into it again, so that while I was absent it lay sleeping. Zitu has granted this to me through his Mouthpiece, that I might more fully understand."

"Thou?" Jadgor eyed him, as though in doubt as to how to take his words.

"I, Jadgor, yes," Zud said. "In the spirit was I present in the palace of Tamhys when you spoke with Lakkon and Robur concerning this same thing, and Robur defended his friend as since coming here he has done. And though I was not seen of you, yet heard I what was said. Hence I believe that the spirit of Zitu hath sent to guide us to a greater knowledge is, as he himself says, the spirit of a man of earth."

"Earth?" Jadgor frowned at the unaccustomed word.

"Aye—a world ruled over by a different sun than ours," Zud rejoined.

"Jasor—since that is the name by which I have known you, and learned to love you," Robur began again, "is this the truth?"

"Yes, Robur my brother, Zud speaks truly," Croft replied.

"You came from—earth?" The crown prince stammered slightly over the planet's name.

"Yes, Robur—I came from earth."

Robur nodded. "I remember now that Sinon of Milidhur mentioned the fact that his son's appearance since his illness had changed, along with his bearing and his knowledge. Jadgor, my father, I believe this truth. Friend of the Crown Prince of Aphur, what was your name on earth?"

"Jason," said Croft.

"Zitu! 'tis well nigh the same."

"Yes," Croft regarded the crown prince, smiling. "And—Robur my friend, it is the spirit which molds the flesh. Hence Jasor's body, after I possessed it, altered in its appearane to some extent. Think back, Prince of Aphur; seems it the same to you now, as in those days when by you it was first known, or has it undergone some still further change?"

"It has changed," Robur replied quickly, his eyes lighting. "Now by Azil himself, I begin to comprehend your meaning, Jason, if I may call you by that name."

"Call me as you will, Rob," Croft returned. "Since I know you are my friend."

LAKKON plucked at Jadgor's arm. "I —would see my daughter, O Jadgor," he said in a lowered voice. "Since she has seen this Jason, I would speak to her of many things."

"Shortly," Jadgor replied. "Say to her that so soon as Jason is proclaimed Mouthpiece of Zitu, we return to Himyra—"

"But should she desire to remain with the Gayana," Lakkon interrupted.

"By Zitu!" Jadgor gave him a frowning glance. "I speak to you and to her through you as her king. Surely I hold place above the children of Aphur yet. Are there not Gayana in Himyra's pyramid as well as here should she decide to give herself to Ga? Repeat to her my words and see that she obeys. Or—hold! I will see the maid myself." He turned back to Croft and Zud. "These things I confess I do not understand, and in truth to me they pass all understanding. Man of Zitu, yet is it clear to my mind that an

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understanding lies between this other and yourself. Wherefore I must ponder the matter well, and seek to determine whether the palace or the pyramid of Zitra shall rule Tamarizia in the future. To thee for the present, Zud—peace. Be pleased to direct that the maiden Naia be brought to an audience chamber for speech with her father and her *king*."

"Jadgor's request is granted." Zud lifted a small hammer from the table and struck against a metal gong.

The door slid back and a lay brother appeared.

Zud spoke to him, directing him to lead Jadgor and Lakkon to an apartment, and command Naia's presence there.

"Peace to you, Zud," Jadgor said again as he turned away.

"And to thee peace," responded Zitu's priest.

"Rob," Croft arrested Aphur's prince as he moved to follow his father, "are you party to this interview with your cousin?"

"No." Robur paused. "I return now to the palace."

Croft nodded. "Presently then. Come now. I would speak with you alone."

For all his controlled demeanor, Croft was none the less disturbed as, leaving Zud, he led Jadgor's son to the room in which for two weeks his body had lain entranced. Jadgor's stand he could understand well enough, as well as his veiled taunt that were it to come to a test of strength between them, Croft might not be able to arm the rest of the nation against Milidhur, Nodhur, and Aphur, for the simple reason that before he would create anything with which to resist the weapons he himself had placed in the hands of Jadgor's men and his allies, he must create shops. Those plants he had thus far brought into being were in Nodhur and Aphur alone—one at Himyra, Jadgor's city, and the other at Ladhra, capital of Nodhur, where lived Sinon and Mellia, the parents of Jasor whose body Croft had made his own—that Sinon and Mellia, whom Jadgor had raised from the merchant caste to the nobility because of the wonders worked by their supposed son.

Nor did Croft like the thought that because of him or anything he had done, Tamarizia should by any chance be torn by internal conflict, or his plans for a republic be overthrown. And yet in Jadgor's words he had read a hint of civil war between the south and western states and the rest of the nation, where Jadgor declined to accept any authority higher than his own. As he had said to the man not half an hour before, the easy victory over Helmor of Zollaria and the acclaim resulting to himself as nominal commander of the Tamarizian army, seemed to have gone to Jadgor's head. And in addition he appeared to feel sincerely that through Croft a possible disgrace had been brought upon his family through Naia, and therefore upon himself.

Also Jadgor had thrown out an intimation that with enough power behind him he would be minded to curtail Croft's activities in so far as he could, once he were on the Zitran throne. Nor did Croft doubt that even were a civil war avoided, Jadgor would be elected president of the republic if let alone. Aphur would vote for him, as would Nodhur unless very quick action was taken. Milidhur could be counted on for support since Robur's wife was the daughter of that state's present king. Cathur, freed from the treason which had weakened it once, would surely favor Jadgor, who had saved it from being overrun and meeting Mazhur's fate of fifty years before. Mazhur might be expected to support the man who had freed her from the slavery she had endured for fifty years. Bithur and Hiranur alone, then were not sure. Of the two, Hiranur would almost certainly support Tammon, the emperor's son, and Bithur might well be expected to split his vote, with the odds on Jadgor again, because of that boasted strength Croft's labors in Aphur had brought—a strength Bithur might feel needed in defense, since Mazzer adjoined her entire eastern frontier and Zollaria, beaten but not crushed, yet threatened dangerously on the north.

All in all he felt that in what he did and said he would tread on delicate ground, as he saw Robur seated and approached the golden casket Zud had opened to inspect the drawings it contained.

But he said nothing of what was seething in his brain as he took out the plans and carried them back to spread them out before Robur's eyes on his couch.

One of them was for a dynamo, water-driven, and nothing else. There were many streams in Tamarizia's mountains, and he had planned to harness their power for the generation of electric force. This then he took up first.

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"Look, Rob," he began as he held it before his companion's eyes. "Can you remember a night in Himyra when Jadgor named me Hupor, and I said the scene would have been more brilliant were light obtained from many lamps of glass inside which a luminous filament glowed?"

"Aye, I remember it well." Robur inclined his head. His face was serious and he seemed ill at ease, as well as somewhat surprised that Croft had turned to the plans rather than taking up a discussion of other things.

But Croft had a purpose in so doing; a hope that by showing Robur the things he planned to accomplish, he might reach Jadgor's ear in a less direct, though no less effective fashion, since doubtless Robur would speak concerning them to the king. "This," he said when assured that the prince recalled his former remark, "is a device to provide such light, and many other things."

FOR an hour thereafter he talked, displaying plan after plan, each one of which he explained, until at the end, Robur's face was flushed with excitement, his eyes glowing in anticipation of beholding undreamed of things.

"Jasor or Jason," he exclaimed at length. "Mouthpiece of Zitu must you be indeed to devise such objects, to have knowledge of them—to draw their designs."

"No—" Croft considered swiftly. Robur was husband to Gaya, and Gaya had stood his friend in his effort to win Naia before. He decided to tell Robur the literal truth. "No, Robur—these things are not mine own. Of Zitu they are—by him permitted for man's use—yet are they things known, and employed daily in the life of men on that star from which I come."

"Earth," said Robur quickly. "These things are known on earth, and the motors, the rifles—"

"Yes," Croft nodded slightly. "And a thousand other things." He took up a final plan. "Rob, what do you think of a device which can lift a man into the air, as a bird rises on its wings?"

"Zitu! Would you fly, Jason of earth!" Robur caught a slightly unsteady breath.

"Aye," Croft spread out the parchment. He had drawn it in a moment of daring impulse, and now he explained to Robur how it was driven by a "motur"—the name he had given to his engines, modified to fit Tamarizian speech, and the action of the planes.

For a time Jadgor's son sat seemingly lost in a silent contemplation of this to him most wonderful fruit of his companion's hand and brain. And then he flung up his head and looked him full in the eyes. "Jason, tell me the truth, in Zitu's name!" he burst into an impassioned query. "Why came you from earth to Palos—what strange force led you to seek life with us?"

And Croft answered that heart-sincere appeal without visible hesitation. "The strongest force in all the sum of Zitu's forces, Robur—that force which men call —love."

"Love?" repeated Robur, staring. "Of a woman, you mean?"

"Of a woman, yes," said Croft, returning his regard directly. "You know well the maid."

"Naia, by Zitu!" Robur sprang to his feet. "You have dared all for her?"

"All," said Croft. "Listen Rob, my true friend to whom I may open my heart: To Palos and Tamarizia I came first, seeking knowledge, having learned how a man may leave his body in the spirit, even as I have proved a man may. Yet knew I not why I chose Palos, until I came to Himyra and saw Naia of Aphur first. But having seen her even in the spirit, I loved her, as a man may love but one woman, in either the spirit or flesh; and because of that love—because to me she meant all and more than any other thing in life, and because I possessed the knowledge and the power, I dared death itself in taking Jasor's body when he laid it down, in order that I might save her from the marriage to Cathur, Jadgor planned, and win her for myself. Jadgor's son knows the rest."

"Aye," Robur said. "And he knows that were the truth understood by Jadgor he would command the maid to your arms, and make sure that these strange instruments, the designs of which you have shown me, should be made in the Himyra and Ladhra shops."

"Hold!" exclaimed Jason. "Stop—once have I saved Naia of Aphur from paying the score of Jadgor's ambitions, nor will I permit it again. If the maiden comes to me at all, Rob, it must be of her own choice—from her own wish, not by the command of Jadgor or another, as my willing mate—not as a price."

Robur nodded. *"Hai,* Jason!" he cried. "Now can I understand you, and find you

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the man I have felt you in my heart." He approached Croft, seized his hand and placed it on his shoulder, laid his own on that of his companion in the posture of greeting used by Tamarizian friends. So for a moment the two men stood eye to eye before Robur went on: "Thy love is a true love—of the heart as well as of the body. Claim me thy friend in this, O Jason—I and Gaya, the woman I won in similar fashion, though I journeyed no farther than to Milidhur to find her. You have seen the maid since your awakening. Tell me; said you to her so much?"

"Yes," Croft told him. "save that she came to me willingly—herself she was free."

"And what said Naia my cousin? O Jason, my heart goes out to you as ever since we have known each other. Robur may find a way to assist a friend."

Once more Croft felt his whole being warm to Aphur's prince. " 'Tis the matter of Jasor's body and Jason's spirit, that disturbs her," he explained. "Concerning that I meant to tell her, as only I could tell it, so that she might understand. That would I have done at a time of my own selecting before she became my wife, save that Abbu of Scira to whom I confessed that my spirit was not Jasor's but one which meant to Tamarizia only good —Abbu, whom I swore to silence in Zitu's name, was by Zud absolved from his oath and spoke. And Zud gaining part of the truth only, yet carried what he had learned to Naia's ears. Zud, startled by what he had learned, named me to her a spirit sent by Zitu. Naia looks upon herself as one deceived, well nigh betrayed."

"But," said Robur quickly, "when you told her of yourself—"

"Nay," Croft replied. "Naia of Aphur is not one to weep, nor ask for explanations."

Robur nodded in comprehension of all Croft's words implied. "So that she knows not as yet of this love that drew you from another world to win her, even as with us a man might go from one kingdom to another. Yet to me it seems that a maid might marvel at a love so great."

Croft's eyes lighted at the suggestion. "As I had hoped she would when I told it in the way I meant to tell it, Rob. See you not that this title proclaimed by Zud is something thrust upon me, rather than sought by myself? For though I meant to be to Tamarizia a teacher in many things, and in so far a mouthpiece in very truth, showing to her people those things known to others, but drawn first from Zitu's mind as all things created must be; yet had I no intent, or wish to greatly exalt myself. In Himyra I sought the rank of Hupor merely because it raised me to her caste. And Zud himself will tell you that in proclaiming me to the people, I have forbidden him to name me other than a teacher—more than a man like themselves."

"Hai!" said Robur. "You have done this, Jason! Did Jadgor know, it would change his stand I think. My father's attitude in this matter grieves me. Let me be *your* mouthpiece in this to bring understanding to his mind."

CROFT considered. In so far as he could see, it could do no possible harm for the Aphurian king to realize that he was seeking no material glory beyond the life with Naia he had planned. That, he felt, was glory enough to pay for all he had done or might do in the future, if it could be attained. He nodded. "Speak, Rob, if you like," he answered. "I am, I confess, more or less disturbed by your father's manner and his words, not for myself so much as for Tamarizia. I would see no split in the nation. I would see her stand proud in her strength, yet guilty of no aggression—ready to defend herself, yet not wishing to attack unless assaulted first, broadening in wisdom and knowledge rather than in lands gained by the conquest of the sword. Speak if you will, Rob, if thereby we may turn Jadgor from what seems to me a dream of personal power, back to that wish for the strength of *all* Tamarizia, which held place in his heart, when I knew him first."

Robur sighed. "Teacher you may well be called, Jason," he said in a tone of accord with Croft's remarks. "Jadgor's name on every lip has been to Jadgor's spirit like wine to a strong man's flesh—nor do I myself think Zud has any wish to interfere with the affairs of state through proclaiming you Mouthpiece of Zitu, even though my father appears to fear some such thing himself. Wherefore I shall tell him of what you have said, if I may. And of this other matter also I shall speak. In that Naia has yielded you her mouth, has felt your arms about her, who are not of her blood; to Jadgor's mind, there lies a disgrace."

Croft nodded again. "Yet would he have given her to Kyphallos, the plaything of Zollaria's unclean woman—the

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master of dancing girls, my friend." His tone grew heavy, as he recalled the inconsistency of Jadgor's course.

"I know—I know," Robur replied. "But that would have been in marriage."

For a moment it was in Croft's mind to retort quickly that the degradation of a loveless union could not be legalized in the sight of Zitu by any words of a priest. But he checked the impulse. "There can be no marriage between Naia and myself until it is brought about by her as well as my wish."

"Failing which she will become Gayana," Robur said and looked full into Jason's eyes.

"Which you do not like yourself," Croft responded, recalling the words Zud and he had heard the man before him speak in the palace room. "Which, should it happen would deprive me of all I have labored in sincere purpose to gain—that which I think Zitu himself is inclined to permit—since he has permitted also that I dwell in the spirit inside Jasor of Nodhur's flesh."

"Aye, by Zitu, I see it!" Robur exclaimed. "Were it said to her, by one to whom she would scarce fail to give ear—then—perhaps she would see it too. Jason—Gaya, my wife, has before this had a hand in this affair of your love. Could she prevail upon my cousin to listen—"

"Rob!" Croft caught an almost quivering breath as he spoke the word. He rose and began a slow pacing of the floor. But presently he paused and once more faced the crown prince.

"At least," he said, "she returns by Jadgor's command to Himyra. Let Gaya speak with her, friend of my heart, to whom my heart is shown, and prevail upon her to remain outside the pyramid until she has taken time to think. Myself, I told her I could explain if the chance were mine. Rob, you and Gaya your wife will do this?"

"Aye," Robur declared, rising also. "Be not cast down in your heart. Inside fourteen suns I shall be governor in Aphur—and I shall see to it that Jadgor understands much which now he does not understand—also, that Naia does not go to the pyramid in Himyra. I shall speak with Magur himself. Speak of this with Zud, Jason. Have him give tablets into my hands to Magur from himself, advising against an immediate action. Then once I am in the palace, Jason, my friend, we shall reopen the Himyra shops, and set the melting furnaces flaring, and make many things for Tamarizia's welfare—even to this machine which flies without moving its wings." His face lighted, and his nostrils flared at the pictures in his brain.

"With you, my brother, and with Zitu it rests, then," Croft said, and the two men struck palms as once on the day of their first meeting they had struck in friendship's pledge.

CHAPTER VIII

SCARLET BLOSSOMS

ALL Zitra was *en fête*. All morning men and women in gala attire, rich and poor and middle class, even the blue men and women of Mazzerian extraction, the serving class of Tamarizia where their parents had been slaves, had been thronging into that immense central square of the island city, whose pavement was a tessellated expanse of rock crystal white and gold.

Always Croft had marveled at the beauty of the imperial capitol since first he saw it. Himyra—the red-walled queen of Aphur, brooding on the banks of the yellow Na, he had thought a dream of Babylonian splendor when first he came to Palos. Himyra he would always love, because it was there he had first seen Naia outside its gates. But Zitra surpassed it in the point of artistic magnificence. Himyra was a city of red and white, of palaces, parks and terraces along the river, studded with shrubs and trees. Zitra was a city of white and silver and crystal and gold—a thing undreamable unless once seen—and even so more like the city of a dream.

About the square, where, on the morning of the third day after Croft had awakened from what he considered his final trip to earth, a huge platform had risen overnight, the populace ranged themselves, close packed. The scene was brilliant in a degree. From the tops of the structures facing the square, built mainly of the predominating white stone used in constructing the city, and even its walls, canopies and streamers of azure blue and scarlet had been stretched as a protection against the sun and its midday heat. They made of the square a temporary auditorium of enormous size, into which the people jostled with a babel of voices, a soft yet vast shuffling of feet. Only at one point was an opening in the billowing covering of the canopies left.

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"We stand now on one of the moons that light your world at night, beloved," Croft said. "And above us turns your world Palos, which we have just left"

There at high noon a ray of the sun would strike through and lie on the platform in the center of the square.

Soldiers of the Imperial Guard, in metal greaves, short-skirted tunics, and breast-plates, armed as in former days, not with rifles, but with short swords, spears, and shields, since this was a formal occasion, were stationed at the end of each street which entered the square, and admitted the crowds in orderly fashion, assigning each arriving group to their proper place in the vast temporary enclosure according to their caste.

By degrees the audience came to seem a thing divided into particolored segments, each composed of the caste for which it had been set aside. There were the blue packed masses of the Mazzerians, with their almost indigo skins scantily covered, a jostling sea of swarming, whispering flesh. There were the laborers in their tawny smocks, their hair cinctured by a golden or copper band, supporting the draped cloth which protected their necks in labor from the sun. And beyond them were the tradesmen with their women, taking on a still more brilliant appearance according to the dictates of

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taste which had clad them in various shades and colors.

And again, nearest the dais was a rippling band of color marking the noble caste—men and women of station and wealth. And here gorgeous might describe the play of colors, the flash and glint of jewels and costly metals, the stately waving of plumes, the flicker of stalwart limbs, of white arms and snowy breasts and shoulders, the iridescent shimmer of diaphanous gauze scarfs. These were the select of the Zitran population. Each gnuppa-drawn carriage that whirled up to the end of the streets disgorged its recumbent passengers from the couchlike seats on which they reclined as they rode, and then retried.

By degrees the square became utterly packed save for a space about the platform maintained by more of the Imperial Guard, and an alley running toward the mouth of a single street. The hour crept on. Through the canopy the sun blazed dimly. Water-bearers with bottles made from the hide of the tabur—an animal widely raised, with the fleece of a sheep and the general shape of a hog—passed through the square, sprinkling the pavement to cool the air, doubly heated by the outer temperature and the multitude of bodies packed into so close a space. Never had there been a greater concourse or a more brilliant in the history of the state. Indeed, in all the annals of the nation, no more auspicious date would appear.

This day marked what might be regarded as a new era in national affairs. The Zollarian war was done. Tamarizia was stronger than ever before in the memory of man, and a new and more liberal government than any they had known was to be adopted within the next few days. And as though that were not enough, it was common knowledge that Zitu had sent the nation a teacher for their welfare; to greet and acclaim him they were gathered here.

Well might the crowd be in holiday attire and humor. Well, as it waited, might its blended voices rise in a cheerful fashion, a ceaseless diapason of sound, changing as there came a blast of brazen trumpets, and Tamhys appeared in magnificent silver harness, to a cheer.

Silver studded with diamonds were the casings upon his calves; silver was the cuirass upon his breast, whereon in azure-colored stones in the circle enclosing an equilateral cross, sign of Hiranur, was blazoned forth. Silver was his helmet, and white as purity itself his tossing plumes. Even the hair upon his head, mark of his years, was silver, as he came down the alley left open, between his guards, and mounted the dais and seated himself upon a silver chair.

Then from without, as the cheering subsided, there came a sound of harps, and in the mouth of the alley down which Tamhys had passed, the head of a procession appeared.

First came the harpers themselves, white clad, marching in ranks of fours. And back of them appeared a litter borne by the brown-clad lay brothers of the Zitran pyramid. Of burnished copper was the litter, inlaid with a silver filigree, and curtained with fluttering draperies of an azure, silklike fabric. From within it, as it advanced behind the harpers, Zud's old eyes peered.

At the foot of the dais it was placed, and the high priest of Zitu emerged, mounting the steps, while a sudden silence fell across the multitude assembled, a reverend figure in his azure robes with the scarlet cross ansata on his breast. He saluted Tamhys and took a second silver chair, leaving a vacant seat between the emperor and himself.

AND now, as the harpers ranged themselves and struck the strings of their instruments in perfect unison, and Zud's litter was swept aside, a second litter appeared.

It was of silver, and its bearers, giant blue men of Mazzer, well-nigh staggered beneath its weight. A sigh, almost a gasp, ran through the assemblage. Zud had been borne by priests, but—the Mouthpiece of Zitu was carried by men—the serving class of the Tamarizian state. Always a people quick to recognize the involved symbolism of an occurrence, few of those present failed to understand Jason's intent in the manner of his appearance—that thereby he implied that he came to them, not as a spiritual teacher, but as a teacher of men.

And then silence came down once more as the litter was placed before the steps of the dais and Zitu's Mouthpiece appeared, and the harps died, and the figure in its azure draperies, whereon flared both the cross and the wings of Azil, mounted slowly to that vacant seat between Tamhys and Zud, the high priest.

The crowd jostled, straining forward to

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see the better, and then settled themselves once more to attention as Zud rose.

He lifted a hand, commanding silence. In his other hand he carried a long silver stave topped with the looped cross. He began speaking at once in the simple fashion which characterized most of the Tamarizian ceremonials:

"Men and women of Zitra and of all Tamarizia, give ear to Zud the high priest's voice, through which it is given to announce to you one who comes among you as teacher, endowed with a wisdom passing the knowledge of Zud or any other among you, by Zitu's grace.

"Jason, as he is named, cometh to instruct the people on whom Zitu smiles, as a sign that his pleasure is in his people, and shall remain while they are obedient to his laws.

"Mouthpiece of Zitu is Jason, and shall be so known while he shall remain among us, and afterward, when the spirit within his body shall have been withdrawn. Exalted he is by the knowledge which Zitu hath seen fit to instil into his mind. Worthy of honor is he from all true men. Yet is he man as thou art, and to him shall no knee bend. Obedience and respect alone are his due. I, Zud, the high priest, have said it. Let all men regard the Mouthpiece of Zitu as his brother as well as his friend."

As Zud paused a second ripple ran through the crowd, a sibilance of whispers. Croft looked down into the nearest rows of uplifted faces and encountered Jadgor's own.

The Aphurian king sat with arms folded, staring directly toward him, his dark face distorted by a frown. The glances of the two men met and held for the merest instant. Croft's was steady. Jadgor's repellent, a voiceless challenge more than anything else. Croft turned his own glance deliberately away, sensing that in whatever he might attempt in the near future he would meet antagonism from Aphur's king. His eyes fell on Lakkon with his countenance somber, and on Robur, just beyond. The crown prince met his regard fully and shook his head. In the gesture, and the expression of his strong face, there was all the poignancy of a groan. It came over Croft that in whatever he may have said to his father since their conversation three days before, Robur had failed.

But he gave over such considerations as once more the harps rang out. He became aware of a spot of sunlight on the platform directly before the chair whereon he sat—almost, indeed, at his feet. Even as he watched it seemed creeping closer—and the harps were thrumming, thrumming sweetly—and the buzz of the vast assembly was once more falling still.

Suddenly the blended voices of a female chorus rang out, rising and falling in rhythmic fashion in perfect time to the harps. Down the alley came a group of vestals bearing flowers in their hands. Clad all in white were they, save for a cincture of golden tissue that ran about the neck, down between the breasts, and fastened in front like a sash with pendant ends, hanging in a golden fringe to the edge of the knee-length skirt. Their hair fell about their rosy faces and bared left arms and shoulders, wholly unrestrained save for a silver cincture about the head. Singing, they came on with a swing and flash of their bared and tinted feet and dimpled knees.

And as they came there flashed into Croft's mind a recollection of the first ceremonial of the noontide hour of contemplation and prayer he had witnessed, not in Zitra, but in Himyra, the first day he had been on Palos.

In a way this was like it, save that then the vestals had sung and danced before the statue of Zitu himself—the statue of a man with a face divinely firm and strong, with purity and compassion written large in its every line. That figure had been portrayed as seated on a throne. And the rays of the noontide sun had shone through an aperture in the roof upon it, bathing it in pure light. With an inward gasp Croft began to understand—his own position, the nearness of the spot of sunlight before him, the position of the chair in which he sat. Zitu was the God of Tamarizia—and he was Zitu's Mouthpiece—and the sunlight was over his knees now. He felt its warmth.

"Behold the Mouthpiece of Zitu!" Zud's voice.

Croft sensed rather than saw the congregation rising—the vestals deployed to right and left in front of the dais, kneeling, holding their floral sprays toward him in extended hands. He became conscious that the spot of sunlight had moved again, was bathing him from head to foot now in its golden rays, was shimmering from a thousand facets of the jewels that etched the cross and the wings of Azil on his breast.

The Gayana burst into a triumphal song:

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"Hail, Mouthpiece of the Omnipotent One,
Of Him from Whom nothing is hidden,
To Whom all things are known.
Hail, Mouthpiece of Zitu;
Hail, Dispenser of Knowledge;
Hail, all hail, teacher,
To whom those things permitted of
Zitu, are known!"

The chant ended. The singers rose. In a scented shower the floral sprays rained at the feet of him who sat on the silver chair with the sunlight on his face.

Croft's senses reeled. The vast concourse faded from his vision. The flowers fell about him unheeded. The graceful forms of the Gayana who showered them toward him grew into a blur. His vision seemed to narrow, contract, focus upon a single point, shutting out all else, making all else as though it were not, leaving him staring, staring at one single gold-framed face.

Naia. She was there before him—her blue eyes meeting his own in an almost angry blaze. Naia—clad as a vestal, in white, bearing a spray of flowers in her hands.

Then, as their glances met, and Croft's breath caught in his throat, she lifted the cluster of blossoms and threw it—threw it, not tossed it, so that it struck full against his breast, rather than fell at his feet—struck, not as a floral offering might strike were the distance of its throwing misjudged, but with a positive, definite force that hinted of some weighty object concealed within its crimson mass, and fell to the dais with a petal-muffled thud, leaving a tiny spot on Croft's flesh that tingled as though the scarlet flowers had been the fingers of a licking flame—as though their touch had seared him through the fabric of his robe.

BY an effort he sat unmoved, unchanged in his position, giving no sign, holding his eyes on the haughty face of the white-clad woman before him, reading upon her smiling lips not the placid expression of the ceremonial that held her retreating sisters as they drew back to either side of the dais, but the curl of scorn, of contempt; so that the contact of the cluster of red blossoms came to seem to him as a slap in the face—a deliberately planned and executed blow. Nor to his whirling senses was that the worst.

His chest heaved in a well-nigh stifled effort at control as he contemplated the full meaning of her presence in the Gayana's dress. Naia a vestal—Naia—given to Ga! The thought slowed his heart for a moment and sent it racing into a wild, ungoverned, suffocating series of madly protesting beats.

Naia become Gayana—Naia forming a part of the chorus which acclaimed his new-found rank—Naia hurling these scarlet blooms, as red as her heart's blood, or his, against him as a farewell act, a sign, a tacit message that, in so far as he was concerned, it might as well be her blood which lay red on the dais at his feet; that she might as well have died; that to him, from now on, she was lost. The thought sickened him, appalled, blotted out everything save itself so that for a moment, despite the sunlight which fell upon him, he had the sensation of an enveloping darkness that threatened to rise up and engulf him. He began to tremble. Tremor after tremor of emotion seized and shook him. And then Zud touched him on the arm. The ordeal was over. A strange babble of voices assailed his ears. He realized that the vast assemblage was cheering him, and in quite automatic fashion he bowed.

The action roused him to some extent. Once more he caught Jadgor's eye, dark, piercing, filled with menace, as the Aphurian turned away in a haughty fashion and, followed by Lakkon and his son, began to edge his way through the departing throng.

"Thy litter awaits thee." Zud's voice was in his ear.

He saw that the blue men of Mazzer had indeed brought the great silver palanquin into position opposite the dais steps. But even so he took time for one word with Zud.

"The maiden—she has become Gayana?"

"Nay!" He met Zud's eyes and found within them comprehension. "She but asked a part in their ranks, and, being virgin, it was granted."

Not Gayana—not yet—not yet. Croft's heart leaped again into freer action. But why had she asked to be given a place in the ranks of the vestals who had hailed him Mouthpiece of Zitu? He stiffened. Why save to cast that bunch of scarlet blossoms, which had stung his flesh, against him? He recalled now that it had stung him when it struck—had stung his flesh even as Naia's expression had stung his spirit. Why had it struck with such unerring certainty the wings of Azil, on his breast? What had it contained save

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the crimson flowers of which it seemed to consist? What was it had directed its course—weighted it until its blow was a blow indeed, delivered sure and straight?

He glanced down. The thing still lay there, a brilliant spot of color among all the floral tributes at his feet. On impulse he stooped and caught it up and carried it with him, a flame-colored thing against his blue robes, as he descended the steps.

He reached the litter, and paused again as his ear was assailed by a single, quickly caught-in breath. His head turned. Once more his gaze encountered a pair of fixed pansy-purple eyes. The vestals waited in double ranks, one on each side of the dais. Naia of Aphur stood among them, one white hand lifted and pressed against her body, to the left of the golden cord that ran down and cinctured her garment between her breasts. And it seemed, in that instant, to Jason Croft that her eyes dwelt not so much upon himself as on the flowers in his hand.

He gave no sign, however, as he entered the litter and felt it lifted into tilting, swaying motion. He took with him that final vision of Naia, caught in a startled posture, of her parted lips, of a something like anguish in her eyes. Like the flowers in his gripping fingers, that picture was caught in his brain.

Swiftly the Mazzerians bore him out of the square and into a street toward the bulk of the pyramid. The streaming crowds gave way before them and stood waiting while they passed. Then, and then only, did Croft seek to learn the mystery of the flowers Naia had thrown. Then and then only did he thrust his fingers into their blood-red mass and grope amid their stems for something he knew was hidden there—though he knew not what.

His search was rewarded almost at once. His fingers encountered a hard object buried among the stalks of the flowers, and he drew it forth. It was a silver medallion, bearing a raised figure of Azil, the angel of life, and surrounded by blood-red stones, such as Tamarizian men gave to the women to whom they were betrothed.

Croft recognized it at a glance. He took it and laid it on his palm, and sat staring at it as the litter swung along. He had ordered it especially made, and given it to Naia himself at the end of the Zollarian war. Like the maids of her nation, she had worn it on her girdle as a sign that to one man, and one alone, Azil had set his seal upon her. And to-day she had flung it from her, against the wings of Azil himself, which Croft wore on his breast.

There was no mistaking the action. It was repudiation. It was the same as though her lips had uttered the declaration that henceforth she would no longer guard for him that shrine of mortal life which was herself.

Croft's lips writhed into a strange smile. He recalled how the thing had pained when it struck above his heart.

CHAPTER IX

ROBUR'S INVITATION

JADGOR was elected over Tammon by an overwhelming majority. Robur became governor of Aphur as a matter of course. In Cathur, Mutlos gained the lead largely because the populace still remembered the treason intended by Kyphallos of Scythys's house, and refused to vote for the dead king's younger son. This was the major result of the elections, so far as Croft was concerned.

Before it was held, however, several things had occurred. Naia and her father, Jadgor and his son, left Zitra the day of Jason's proclaiming, in a motor-driven galley. Robur contrived an interview with Croft before he left.

Croft in the meantime had seen Zud as soon as he returned to the pyramid, and showed him the jeweled medallion, and narrated to him the manner in which it had been returned. At the end he requested a letter to Magur such as Robur and he had discussed, asking the Himyra priest to advise delay, provided Naia sought admission to the vestal ranks.

The tablets of wax whereon Zud wrote his commands Croft gave to Robur, and the two friends gripped hands.

"Jadgor had turned his face from you," Robur said. "Always has he been of stubborn mind. But, by Zitu, once I am in Himyra's palace, there will be a place for you, my friend, wherein we will work out your strange designs!"

"Yes," Croft replied, sensing readily enough that Robur's interest in the construction of new implements of commercial and industrial progress was intense, and intending fully to carry out his plans in regard to Tamarizia in so far as he might with or without Jadgor's favor.

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And then he changed to the subject nearest his own heart. "Your cousin goes with you, Rob?"

"Aye," Robur declared. "She yields to Jadgor's command, saying one may forget herself no less in Himyra than in Zitra's pyramid. Yet strengthen your heart, man of earth. These tablets I have from Zud to Magur, and in Himyra is Gaya, to whom, I believe, my cousin will open her heart. At present the maid is overwrought, and Jadgor's attitude toward you does not strengthen your case."

"You spoke with him concerning those things we discussed three suns ago?" Croft questioned.

"Aye, and to small avail." Robur frowned. "His stand is, you should have told them to him, rather than to Zud, at first. You will remember how Zud swayed Tamhys before the Zollarian war in your favor. Jadgor refused to accept it other than that there is an understanding between the high priest and yourself."

"Then must our works convince him since our words fail," said Croft. "Robur, my friend, a safe and pleasant journey. May Kronhur, ruler of the oceans, provide you a peaceful path to Himyra's gate. Make my salutations to the gentle Gaya, whom I trust I may ere long greet. In her hands and yours, Robur, is carried Jason's fate."

"It shall be carefully carried, by Zitu!" Robur promised. "Robur strikes not his hand in friendship lightly. Soon in Himyra shall he greet you, and we shall work. And"—suddenly he smiled—"see you not that Naia herself will be in Himyra—wherefore once you are come again to Aphur, the same red walls shall encircle you both?"

"Ha!" Croft's eyes lighted at the mere suggestion, and he gave vent to a somewhat nervous laugh. And then he sobered. "But hold! Jadgor elected, will not Lakkon and his daughter come to Zitra?"

"Scarcely." Robur looked full into his companion's eyes. "I think she will not look with favor on life in Zitra in her present mind."

Croft nodded in comprehension. "Zitu spare you, Rob," he said, "for I need you in my work."

And Robur, always quick in his appreciation of humor, laughed.

Yet, though Croft had spoken lightly at the last, he watched the Aphurian depart with a mind which was deeply troubled, not only by Naia's attitude toward himself and her return of the betrothal jewel, but as well by the defection of Jadgor, on whose major support he had counted much for success in his future plans. Indeed, just then it seemed to Croft that those plans were of little account and his entire future happiness marred.

Like many men of large mind, he suffered the pang of realization that lesser minds, because of their limitations, must fail to follow his own, that small natures must fall short of a full appreciation of a greater, simply because of an inability to measure the broader character by any standard of their own. He was meeting for the first time in a degree that thing known as the ingratitude of men, which every leader of men or nations must meet at times. And the taste was bitter in his mouth.

HE took out the jewel and sat looking at it, holding it displayed or shut up in a clenched palm for hours, until the sun sank and twilight crept into the embrasure of the room, and a lay brother, slipping in to light the oil sconces on the wall, brought word that Zud desired speech with him alone.

Whereupon Croft rose and watched the wicks flare forth, and suddenly threw up his head and took a long breath. His mind went back to his talk with Robur three days before. They had spoken of electric lights. Why not? Work—work—that was the antidote for mental pain—to work—to throw one's self into a very frenzy of stubborn endeavor and drown the mental woe in a physical weariness, an actual tire of the brain. Work! He stretched forth his arms. He would work, work—he would show Tamarizia wonders such as she had never known. He would show Jadgor. He would bring the haughty Aphurian to his knees by force of sheer knowledge and what it wrought. He would compel him, force him to seek his, Croft's, favor, because he could ill afford to do anything else. And—he smiled grimly—he would do it with the aid of Jadgor's son—so soon as the elections were over and he might go to Himyra, where Robur had said there would be "a place." His eyes lighted and his lips grew firm. He made his resolve. His moment of first mental travail was past. He put the jewel away inside his robes and waited for Zud's coming with an expression of fresh resolve.

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For four days thereafter he remained in constant company with Zud. Two things occupied his time—the instruction of the high priest in the mysteries of astral control, at first compelling the projections by his own will. Later Zud gained a minor success for himself, a thing he accomplished quickly because of his great desire to learn, and Croft took up certain social reforms he had long had in mind.

A more general education was the first of these. At Scira in Cathur, Tamarizia had maintained a national school. This, however, was for the patronage of the rich. Among the masses little education was known. Croft decided at once to alter this. To Zud he outlined a scheme for a general system of schools. Assisted by the high priest, he drafted a provisional alphabet, to which the hieroglyphic characters not unlike those of the Maya inscriptions in Central America lent itself with little change. Already in Himyra he had constructed a form of printing press for large character work. Now he took up the subject of perfecting and elaborating this to the wonder of Zud, whose enthusiastic approbation he instantly gained. He thought the matter of the schools might be easily arranged. The national school was under the patronage of the church. Most of the priests were educated in it. Teachers could be drawn from their ranks; and if the matter were carefully broached, both Jason and Zud felt inclined to believe that the move would meet with little opposition from Jadgor at first—especially if the suggestion came from some such one as Mutlos, governor of Cathur, whom Zud would see was properly approached by the faculty of the national school, rather than by Zud or Croft.

Late on the afternoon of the fourth day, however, Croft went to his own quarters, loosened his clothing, and laid himself down on the golden couch. There had been time for Jadgor's galley to have reached Himyra, as he knew—time for Naia to have gone either to her own home or the palace, as Jadgor and her father had elected. Closing his eyes and fixing his mind on the red-walled city of Aphur, he brought all his will to bear upon his one desire, and projected his astral entity to Himyra in a flash.

It lay beneath him as he had seen it the first day he came to Palos, a far-flung circuit of walls—the farther lost in a heat haze until it appeared no more than a ruddy shadow through a shimmering veil—spread out on either side of the river Na, inside its banks of cut stone, its quays, whereon at night the fire-urns flared red at the foot of the terraces and shone redly on the yellow waves. Magur's pyramid—red with its ringing band of white, to mark the quarters of the Gayana—with its white temple of Zitu, jutted up across the river from the vast white pile of the palace, and on either side as far as the eye could reach along the crest of the river terrace stretched the palatial homes of the noble or rich.

There was almost a sense of homecoming in the sight, and Croft experienced a thrill as he willed himself swiftly toward a huge red palace set well back from the street—the city home of Lakkon, advisor to the king.

To-day the doors stood open, and he passed into the major court, where flowers, shrubs, and even small trees grew between the divisions of a pavement of transparent rock crystal, cut into geometrical blocks, beneath a roof of movable sections of glass.

THE court itself was two stories in height in the prevailing custom, with a staircase ascending to the surrounding balcony at either end. These were of a lemon-yellow stone like onyx, save that it was not veined. The pillars of the balcony and the rest of the interior was in white. A low-growing hedge enclosed the central portion of the crystal floor, whereon Baska, the Mazzerian major-domo, who had startled Croft the first time he saw his blue skin, was once more exhibiting his magnificent form and peculiar pigmentary endowments with amazing frankness while he trimmed the hedge. Maia—Naia's own personal maid—in an equal state of unabashed nature, was sprawled, watching on a red wood couch.

So much Croft saw at a glance before he turned away, judging, from the very nature of the servants' careless manner, that Lakkon and his daughter had not yet arrived.

The palace, then. He willed himself toward it, entered it through the main gates between the huge carved figures of the winged doglike creatures set up on either side, their front legs supporting webbed membranes from body to paw. He passed into a vast, red-paved court, where naked Mazzerian porters passed to and fro with metal sprinkling tanks

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strapped to their shoulders, and gnuppas, harnessed to flashing chariots, champed on their bits and pawed.

To Croft, it was all an old story. He had lived in it once. He gave a single embracing glance to the white walls of the various government departments surrounding the huge red court, each with its guardian sentries at the doors, and fixed his mind on gaining the presence of Gaya, Robur's wife.

For here he felt Naia would have gone had she come to the palace, as he believed seeking the company and companionship of a woman rather than any one else.

In this his judgment proved right, as he found so soon as he reached the wing of the palace in which he had formerly lived. Here, in the portion given over to Robur and his wife, was a court containing a private bath, set in the center, surrounded on all sides by growing shrubs and flowers, the tessellated pavements about it dotted with chairs and couches of the wine-red wood and silklike canopies to offer shade against the Palosian sun. It was a favorite resting-place of Gaya in the afternoons, when, attended by her servants, she either bathed in the limpid, sun-warmed water or received such guests as might elect to pay a social call.

On two of the red couches he found the women he had come in search of. They reclined beneath a yellow awning supported by standards, with a low table between them, holding small cakes, fruit conserves such as the women of Tamarizia affected, and crystal glasses, scarcely larger than a thimble, filled with an amber-colored wine.

But it was to Naia Croft gave his major attention once he had reached the palace. She lay pale, her eyes shadowed by darkened circles beneath their lids, her features weary, drawn with what he recognized at a glance at a dangerous tension of the nerves. Her figure was draped in a robe of exquisite green, across the upper part of which a strand of her fair hair made a sheen of gold. To Croft she had never seemed more appealing than now, in this mood of acute distress. He glanced at Gaya, and found her eyes fixed in an anxious inspection of her companion's face.

Abruptly Naia's breast swelled sharply and she spoke: "I shall become Gayana. There is nothing else."

"Nay! Nay, daughter of Lakkon—you are overwrought. Robur thinks not so, nor Jadgor, his father. To Lakkon there is none other, since your mother died, save yourself. Would leave him to finish his life alone?"

Naia sat up upon the couch. "That was true," she returned in a tone gone bitter, "until this trouble came upon me. Now Lakkon holds me disgraced—in that I have yielded my lips to Zitu's Mouthpiece, against all the laws of custom for a woman of my caste. Yet, in Zitu's name, wherein was I to blame, who loved as never a woman loved before—who was asked in marriage by the one she loved, by one who had sworn, aye, and done many deeds to win her? In what did I wrong? How could I foresee that he was not—what—what he appeared?"

"Nay," Gaya said, while Croft's soul quivered at this confession from the lips of the woman he loved above all else. "Say not that in any way were you to blame, Naia, fairest of Aphur's maids. For have you and I not spoken concerning your love ere this, and did you not first to me confess it, when you stood pledge to Cathur's heir, from whom this man of Zitu saved you?"

"Man," Naia caught her up, interrupting quickly. "Say you that he is a man—Gaya, my friend—or is the word but used as a means of expressions since you know not what to call him save as he seems?"

"Nay, I mean man, child," Gaya returned. "Man he appears, and man he claims to be, and man he is. You know Robur for his friend. Much to Robur has he explained since he wakened from the last of his strange sleeps. Yet is he such a man as never was seen on Palos before; and though of mortal birth, as we are, yet was he not born on Palos, but of a woman on earth."

"Earth?" Naia's eyes widened swiftly.

"Aye—a different star from ours," Gaya replied.

"ROBUR told you this?" An introspective expression crossed Naia's face.

"Aye—ere he brought you to me."

"And he told Robur?"

"Aye. He swore it by Zitu himself."

Suddenly Naia struck herself upon the breast. "He told it to Robur—to your husband—to Jadgor's son! Why not to me?" she cried.

"To Robur he swore he had meant to tell you ere you became his mate," Gaya rejoined. "Save that Zud learned these

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things from Abbu of Scira and spoke to you during his sleep, I feel assured he had done it at a proper time."

She paused, and Naia turned her head. She sat staring, staring across the sun-kissed surface of the sunken bath. "Now I remember that he said to me after he awakened, when he came to me in the quarters of the Gayana, that he had somewhat to explain. What said he else?"

"Strange things—things to madden the heart of a woman, as it seems to me," Gaya returned; "things to waken strange dreams in her soul, if true. To Robur he swore that to Palos he came because of you, because in you he knew the mate to whom his spirit cried out—that he remained on Palos to save you from Cathur and win you for himself, and to that end that he might claim you wholly, used Jasor's body when his spirit was drawn from his flesh."

"Zitu!" The word came from Naia's lips as a strangled exclamation. She drew herself up on the couch until she sat tense in every quivering fiber of her being. "Now you have touched on the part of the matter I may not tolerate or understand. Granting that he says truth—that a spirit may enter the body of another and possess it, and cause it to live and breathe, and move as its own—can a maid consider a lover in such guise, surrendering to his embrace?"

"Yet consider," said Gaya softly, with a widening of her eyes as though the spell of the subject were upon her fully; "try to measure if you can, my princess, a love so vast that it draws its mate across the space between the stars. Consider what this man's love must be that he forsakes that life to which he was born and comes in search of you—the one woman who fills his soul with longing; and consider, also, that after he entered Jasor's form it changed—that even Sinon declared he no longer resembled Jasor greatly. Seems it not to you that Jason's spirit has altered the elements that were Jasor's until they are as his own?"

"Jason?" Naia faltered.

"Aye. That was his name on earth. Also says he that it is the spirit within us which dwells in and makes us of the flesh. He says, and Zud supports him in saying that to the spirit the flesh is no more than to man is a house—a something he inhabits, makes use of, and finally lays aside."

"Stop!" Naia stayed her. "Why—why were these things not said to me before—before—" She broke off, clasped her hands and crushed them together, struck them down against her sides. "Nay—it might have been," she went on, more to herself than to Gaya, "had I given the chance. He came to me, and I berated him with words. I was filled with pain; my spirit was blinded with horror and despair. I thought only that I had been led to my own undoing—I knew not the truth.

"Zud's words had well nigh unsettled my mind. Wherefore I prayed to Ga and Azil, and there was no answer. And then I prayed to Zilla, and even the angel of death turned away his face. Gaya, I am like one fallen into a pit from which there is no escape. Him I knew as Jasor—I loved with a glory of the spirit and a madness of the flesh. He was my master. His word was my law. My heart beat like a caged bird in his presence. My spirit faltered when he spoke to me. My flesh was as clay in the potter's hands to his touch. I was a slave, and my glory was in the slavery of my love. Save only Zitu, beyond him there was for me no god!"

Once more she paused and sat panting, her bosom rising and falling, her nostrils aquiver, her lips compressed, while Croft yearned to her and this voicing of a love no less, as it seemed to him, than his love for herself.

"Canst wonder, then," she went on after a moment, "with what gladness I gave him my pledge; with what joy in my thoughts of the future I wore upon my girdle the badge of Azil he placed within my hands as sign that I was his—that badge which, on the day of his proclaiming Mouthpiece of Zitu, I placed in a spray of flowers and hurled against his breast!"

"Naia! Child!" Gaya half started up at the climax of her companion's words. "You did that—did he—understand?"

Naia nodded slightly. "I think so. He—from the dais he carried the flowers I flung against him to his litter in his hand. Oh, Gaya—my soul died within me at that sight—would Zitu—the rest of me had died. I am alone, Gaya—alone. Alone, alone—the word tunes my every breath. Jadgor opposes my seeking the Gayana. My father looks on his name as through me disgraced. And I am tired, Gaya—tired—so very tired. And there is no rest. If only Zilla would hear me when I call him—"

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"Aye, you are tired, poor child." Gaya rose, crossed to the other couch, and took the girl's golden head inside her arms. "Come, talk no more at present. I shall call Bela, my own maid, who shall attend you. You shall bathe, and afterward she shall anoint your flesh with sweet-smelling oils, and you will sleep and awaken refreshed. She has a soothing touch beyond any I have ever found. She shall wait upon you." She reached out to the table and struck a small metal gong.

"Refreshed," said Naia slowly. Once more her eyes were fastened on the sun-kissed water. "Aye, I shall bathe, gentle Gaya. I shall find rest in your pool."

She rose slowly. Her eyes were wide; her face was very white. Turning, she walked to the edge of the sunken basin. For a moment she stood there in the attitude of one who listens.

Her lips moved. "Zilla," she whispered and smiled.

And then her voice raised, rang out sharply: "Zilla, I hear thy answer!"

Her arms lifted, stretched upward. She plunged face downward into the pool and sank without a struggle into its transparent depths.

CHAPTER X

ASTRAL UNDERSTANDING

AND now began one of the most amazing parts of Croft's whole tale.

He saw Naia sink. He knew the meaning of her words, her act. Her cry to Zilla, the Angel of Death, showed him clearly that she saw in the water the way of death for herself—read a new meaning into her words to Gaya, that here in the pool she would find rest. He saw the water close about her, saw her well-loved form sink down, down, cradled in the limpid water; down, down, a slender figure, as beautiful as a Tanagra statuette in its green robe, as it sank. He knew that indeed Zilla hovered close above her—knew she was drowning—that the element in which her figure was engulfed would, like the figurative lips of Zilla, soon suffocate her breath.

And he was powerless, impotent, to do anything save watch what went on before his eyes. He could see, and know, and understand. He could suffer the most terrible agony of conscious comprehension, and—in his astral presence he could do nothing else. In his soul he writhed, cried out in a torment in which, like the despairing mind of the girl, he would have welcomed dissolution as a relief. But aside from that he was chained to a passive watching, was unable to make one single move toward the rescue of her expiring flesh.

Not so Gaya, however. Nor did Robur's wife lose her head. Her comprehension of her companion's act was instant, and she cried aloud to the Mazzerian girl, who now appeared in answer to the summons of the gong. Then; without waiting for even the servant to reach her side, Gaya flung her own form into the pool in a cleanly executed dive. Bela followed her mistress a moment later, her blue figure cutting the liquid surface with hardly a splash. Both women were entirely at home in the water, and by the time Gaya had reached and seized Naia, who began instantly to struggle, Bela was at her side.

The fight below the surface was brief. Croft saw Naia open her mouth. Her bosom expanded as though she gasped. And then she relaxed, and Robur's wife and the Mazzerian maid bore her quickly upward, supporting her head between them, and swimming with her toward a submerged flight of steps by which the pool was customarily entered. Reaching it, they lifted the limp body in its trailing robe, which clung to trunk and rounded limb more like a shroud of vegetation, a crinkled kelp born of the water itself, than a garment, and staggered with it from the pool to lay it on the pavement of the court.

"Quickly!" Gaya cried as she knelt beside it. "Seek out Jadgor's physician and command his presence." Unmindful of her own soaked condition, she seized Naia's form and rolled her upon her face. Placing her hands on either side of the body close to where the ribs joined the spine, she threw her weight forward on extended arms, held so for the space of a long breath, and lifted herself once more upon her own flexed thighs.

It was a form of artificial respiration she was practising, and Croft uttered a prayer for her success in his heart. And then—he forgot temporarily her continued efforts in the wonder of something else.

Naia of Aphur was about to die. Croft knew it as certainly as he had ever known anything in his life. Because he saw her soul come forth as he had seen Zud's astral body after he had bidden it leave its fleshy habitation on the day he

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awakened from his sleep. Slowly, as Gaya lifted herself and sat back, it emerged from the figure on the ground. And as wonderful as was the form of Naia, so wonderful was its astral counterpart. Like an image of her beauty in every detail, it swam and hovered above her, still chained for the span of a breath by an almost invisible bond that wavered and tensed and threatened to break.

And that breaking—the snapping of that soul cord—the counterpart of the union between the maternal substance and the body of the child in physical birth—spelled physical death. With its severance, as Croft knew, Naia would pass from the mortal plane to a wholly astral life. But more than that he knew that now it was within his province to take definite steps to preserve once more the woman he so wholly loved—that now at last he could act.

Toward the lovely floating shape he compelled his own astral form until he floated with it face to face. "Naia—Naia—thou other part of me," he thought rather than cried to her; "Naia—my beloved—hold. Return again to thy body. Go back."

And he knew that she received the potent vibration his own soul gave out. For slowly the head of the floating figure, the dream shape which swung and glowed like an iridescent mist in the sunlight, turned its head toward him—seemed to regard him strangely with wide open, startled eyes.

"Naia!" He sent his appeal to her again. "Naia, it is that Jason whom you knew as Jasor who commands that you return again to your flesh. In Zitu's name, beloved."

The rainbow figure writhed. It seemed to quiver, to hesitate and sink slightly back toward the unconscious body beside which Gaya kept up her work, with darkly troubled eyes; so that there was some relaxing of that binding cord.

"Jason!" Croft felt the thought impinge against him.

"Jason, who loves you—who claims you—who shall claim you yet," he returned, driving each word into her perception with the full force of his will.

"What do you here?"

It was a question, a wondering interrogation. He answered it truly. "You know of my sleeps. In them my spirit leaves the body. It visits many places. Now sleeps my body in the Zitran pyramid, yet is my spirit present to watch over you and guard you. It was not Zilla called you into the pool, but your own troubled spirit, beloved. Go back into your body—in the name of the love you confessed to Gaya; go back."

"But—why—am I not myself?" a second question faltered to his perception.

"Yes, you are yourself always," he returned. "Yet this is the real you which speaks to the real me, beloved. Look beneath you, and tell me what you see."

FOR a moment nothing was said . . . as the form beside him turned down its eyes. And then a startled response: "Gaya—she bends and works beside a form—to—to which I seem in some way connected. It—Zitu! Azil! It is the form of one like myself!"

"It is your own form, Naia," Croft told her; "the body in which all your life you have dwelt—the beautiful habitation of your spirit—which you cast into the pool in an effort to gain rest."

"But—I—I—" The diaphanous soul form began once more to tremble.

"You are you—even as I am I," said Croft. "That body over which Gaya works is but the servant which has done your bidding, which, save you obey me, you condemn to death. Return to it before it is too late. I, Jason, who have met you midway between the body Azil gave you and Zilla's domain, command it. Between you and Zilla himself I stand as a barrier. Return to the form below you and give it breath."

"How—how shall I return?" Again a question.

"Wish it," said Croft. "Wish it as I desire to hold it in my arms and claim its love and yours."

"I—I shall return." It was a promise.

Croft thrilled at the victory he had won. "Yet hold!" He stayed her as slowly she began to sink closer to the form beneath them. "Again shall you leave it if I call you—leave it as now—to meet me as now you meet me, and return." For the thought had come to him that in this guise might he seek out her spirit and converse with it and teach it many things—seek it and hold it until such a time as events should straighten out the tangle in their affairs, and thereby watch over and guard her.

"Now go, beloved. See with what a frenzy of hopeful endeavor Gaya works."

From beside him that figure as fair as the play of sunlight through the prism of a fine mist vanished.

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Into his ears there stabbed the cry of a physical voice, upraised in triumph. It was Gaya speaking. "She lives! Thanks be to Zitu, she lives!"

She bent and lifted the body, which rewarded her efforts with a gasping breath, and laid it on one of the red wood couches, caught up one of the tiny glasses of wine from the table, and forced its contents into Naia's mouth.

Naia gasped. Her throat contracted sharply. She swallowed. Again and again her full chest swelled beneath her clinging robe. Some of the waxen pallor went out of throat and cheeks. Bela appeared running, with the physician behind her. He hurried to the couch and dropped his fingers to the patient's pulse.

And now came Robur across the court toward the group beneath the yellow awning. He reached it and slipped his arm about Gaya's shaking shoulders, placing himself at her side. For now that the need of her presence of mind was lacking, she seemed completely exhausted and on the brink of tears.

"She—she cried on Zilla and cast herself into the pool," she half spoke, half sobbed. "Beloved, she—she was dead to all seeming—but—I cried on Zitu, and worked above her, and now—she lives."

The physician bowed. "The Princess Gaya has in truth done a most admirable piece of work."

Naia's lips moved. "Jason," she whispered, "I—I have obeyed."

"Hai!" Robur started. His eyes darted swiftly from the girl to his wife, and back to the physician. "What said she?" he asked.

"She dreams, doubtless," the physician made answer.

But Croft knew she did not, and Robur frowned slightly as one perplexed.

Naia opened her eyes. They stared up blankly at the yellow canopy overhead.

Gaya bent above her.

"Gaya!" she cried and lifted her slender arms and laid hold upon her. "Oh, Gaya, I—I dreamt that I—had died. I—"

And suddenly she broke—broke utterly—and clung fast to the drenched form of the woman beside her, shaken by a storm of sobs.

FROM the blended group Robur turned to Bela and the physician. "This is forgotten as though it had not been, man of healing," his voice came thickly. "By you and by Bela, it is as if it were not. I myself shall see that it reaches Lakkon's ears." He reached into a purse at his belt and extracted some pieces of silver, extending them to the doctor. "Your fee. What needs she else?"

"Rest—quiet for perhaps a sun; no more." The physician accepted his payment with a second bow of respect.

"See to it." Robur turned to Bela. "Go—and return with women to bear her to her apartment without delay."

Then, as Bela ran once more from the court, he approached Naia and his wife.

"Peace, Naia, my cousin," he said gently, yet with a narrowing of the eyes. "Know you not that Robur is friend to you and—Jason?" He paused for the barest space before the final word.

The face he watched flushed slightly despite the sluggish return of the blood to her stagnant veins. For a single instant a strange expression burned in her purple eyes. "You say that you dreamed, my cousin," Robur went on. "Praise be to Zitu, it was but a dream. Yet"—and now again he watched her very closely—"in waking you spoke Jason's name."

"He—he sent me back," Naia of Aphur faltered. "In—in my dream I met him, and he showed me my body, with Gaya working beside it, and compelled me to return. It—was all—very strange."

"Zitu!" Robur started. "A—strange dream indeed, my cousin," he said, with an equally strange expression on his face. To Croft it appeared that without fully understanding, his friend half suspected the truth.

Bela and three other Mazzerian women now reappeared. They lifted the couch upon which Naia was lying, and bore it from the court into the palace and to a sumptuous apartment on the second floor. Walls, windows, and doors were hung in yellow draperies. A huge purple rug was on the floor. A copper couch, studded with amber jewels, stood ready to receive the patient. Caskets for clothing, tables and chairs and stools completed the appointments. Plainly, it was a room designed for women, as Croft knew at a glance, since in the center of the floor was one of the mirrorlike pools of shallow water, close to which stood a pedestal of silver, bearing the figure of Azil with extended wings.

By a strange chance, as Naia was borne in, one of the Mazzerians struck against the beautifully carved figure. It tottered, swayed drunkenly on its standard, and fell into the pool.

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Naia cried out at the sight, and covered her eyes.

Robur sprang forward and lifted the statue, setting it back on its base. "Fear not!" he exclaimed. "It is wholly uninjured. 'Tis a good augury, my cousin, I think. Life fell into the pool, and life comes forth unmarred." He smiled.

Naia relaxed from her tension. Her eyes met his. "You are quick to read signs, my cousin," she faltered. "Perchance—you are right."

The bearers set down her couch, and Gaya took charge. "Disrobe her," she commanded. "Bring sweet oils and massage her body and limbs. Cover her lightly, and do you, Bela, sit beside her, to supply her wants. Yet if sleep comes, permit her to rest. When I have changed my own garments I shall return."

She left the apartment with Robur at her side. Croft followed, filled with a wonderful exaltation, since now at least he had come in contact with Naia's spirit as never before, and in a way which assured a repetition of the meeting on that plane when he desired. True, she regarded the experience now as no more than an exceedingly strange dream, but the mere fact that she remembered was proof sufficient to Croft that the effect he desired had been gained. To himself he made a promise that from now on, when conditions were suitable for the experience, she should dream again.

AS FOR Robur, he was of the opinion that the Aphurian prince was not sure that Naia had dreamed at all. And the first words of his friend, once he was outside the door of the apartment where the serving maids ministered to his cousin, confirmed Croft's thought.

"Thus," he began to Gaya as she turned to her own room, "does Jason prove his sayings truth."

"What mean you?" Gaya paused.

"That he stood between her and Zilla, to whom she called, before she flung herself into the pool," Robur said. "Heard you not her words that he sent her back—that she beheld her body beside which you knelt? And do you not recall that I told you he had explained to me that in his sleeps he left his own body even so, and gained knowledge by visiting other places in the spirit? By Zitu's grace, Jason was here when this occurred."

"Here?" Gaya turned her eyes about her in an almost ludicrous fashion, and Robur smiled.

"Aye—his spirit. In Zitra his body lies asleep. Yet here has spirit met spirit and his conversed with hers. By Zitu, but I had a fright! I had been to Magur with tablets from Zud which Jason gave me, and, returning, I heard Bela cry to another of the maidens that one had fallen into the pool. Gaya"—of a sudden he swept her into his arms—"my heart died, and I ran to find that my fears were vain."

"As you might have known," said Gaya, smiling into his down-bent eyes. "Know you not that I learned to swim as a child?"

"Aye," Robur admitted; "yet strange things happen, and never more on Palos than now. By Zitu, I must carry this to Lakkon's ears. He takes not the right stand with this troubled daughter of his. Go now and change your dress, my Gaya." He released her and went stalking off, his forehead furrowed with thought.

And he sought out Lakkon.

"My lord," he accosted him without other introduction, "have you thought of the meaning to you of Naia's loss?"

"What mean you?"

Lakkon turned in a flash. His face darkened, and a quick, instinctive expression of pain leaped into his eyes. "Would you question my love for my daughter, Prince of Aphur? Know you not that in her very glance, her every movement, I see her mother as I knew and loved her first? And"—his voice gruff at first, grew unsteady—"know you not that I loved her aunt, my wife? What need of your question, then, Robur, son of Jadgor, since—should she go to the Gayana, shall she not to me be lost?"

"She shall go not to the Gayana, I think," said Robur slowly. "Magur will advise against it."

"How know you?" Lakkon asked.

"He himself told me." Robur met his uncle's questioning gaze with a level glance.

"You?" Plainly Lakkon was surprised. "You spoke with him about it?"

"Aye," Robur made answer. "He told me he would advise against it at the present. Listen, Lakkon, my uncle." He went on and told him what had occurred. And, as he spoke, Lakkon's face took on a twitching, his breathing became heavy.

"But she lives—she lives—Robur—she has passed this danger?" he questioned brokenly at the last.

"Aye. And were her father to appear

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before her—were he to smile upon her," said Robur with evident meaning, "she were less apt to cry to Zilla again in the future, I think."

"Aye." A quiver sat on Lakkon's mouth. For the moment he was wholly the father, no more the noble or the courtier. For the time his thought was of his child, her life and nothing else. "Aye, Robur—I have been remiss, and praise to Zitu that his lesson is by example and nothing worse. I—I shall go to her. I—I shall try to comfort her in this."

"As you should." Robur inclined his head. "Go, and Zitu frame the wisdom of your speech."

Lakkon went. He crept into the room where Bela sat and Naia lay relaxed on her couch. He went quite to it and sank on his knees beside it, and looked with misted eyes into her weary face.

"Child of my loins," he quavered to her. "Child of thy mother, seek not to leave me again. Be thou the spring-time to my old age, the starlight for my eyes."

"My father." Naia lifted a hand and laid it on his head. "That I sought to leave you was that it seemed to me best—that—that I was tired in body and spirit—that for me there seemed no place."

"Thy place is in my heart," said Lakkon with a heavy, rasping sob.

Slowly Naia drew the grizzled head toward her till it lay upon her shoulder. "I would go to our home in the mountains," she said, "and dwell there in quietude—and—rest."

CHAPTER XI

BLUE AND GOLD

FOLLOWED now for Croft the weirdest wooing mortal ever dreamed, a sort of astral courtship, wherein what might perhaps be best described as the sublimated essence of Naia's being—that astral shell containing her conscious spirit, met and communed with his.

To the man this period became a strange source of encouragement mixed with intervals of an ineffable delight. And the fact that to Naia herself, the hours so spent seemed as dreams rather than a thing of actual occurrence, disturbed him not in the least. He was content to let the truth develop in her soul by degrees, until it should at last be known *as* truth.

On the second day after her despairing attempt against herself in the pool at the Himyra palace, and so soon as her own buoyant vitality had made her well-nigh her physical self, Naia departed for Lakkon's palace in the mountains of Aphur, across the desert from Himyra to the west. Renewed understanding with her father, plus an interview with Magur, in which the priest advised against her joining the Gayana, helped her in the resolve to withdraw for a time to that seclusion, a wish for which she had already expressed.

She made the trip in the motor Croft had caused to be fashioned for her when the things were new on Palos, and had driven out to her mountain home himself. And with Maia, her maid, and Mitlos the Mazzerian majordomo, left always in charge of the palace, together with the great dog-like creature, Hupor, as her body-guard, she took up the course of restful days.

Sometimes she lay for hours on a couch in the central court—sometimes she bathed in the sun-warmed water of a pool behind the palace—a thing constructed of a lemon-yellow stone in sides and bottom, and screened by a wall of white, overgrown with trailing vines. Sometimes she rode in the motor, driving it herself along the splendid Aphurian roads—as perfectly built as the roads of the ancient Romans—which on his first sight of them, had excited the admiration of Croft—roads that stretched throughout the nation; over which the huge sarpelca caravans passed.

Sometimes, endowed with a splendid strength for all her slender grace, she climbed with Hupor at her side, among the hills. And many, many nights she sat in the sunken gardens, wherein the bathing-pool was placed, watching the three moons of Palos wheel across the sky, and thinking her own thoughts. It was Croft's purpose at this time to see that in the latter he lacked no part.

Hence, on the night following her arrival, he visited her first, purposely choosing a late hour, since he wished her to be asleep and preferred to have his own action unknown just then, in the Zitran pyramid.

And as he hoped, when he stole into her apartments, making ingress through an open window, he found her indeed asleep. The moonlight through a half-drawn curtain showed her to him, stretched on a metal couch with the cloud of her loosened hair about her

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"Fly for your lives!" one of the workmen cried, and they all scattered, except Jason Croft, as the giant spark leaped the gap between the two terminals of the dynamo

face. Coverings of silken fineness lay above her. Azil, with outstretched wings, seemed like some white guardian of her slumber on his pedestal beside the mirror-pool.

Naia of Aphur! The woman of his soul. She lay here before him. Croft thrilled to the thought that she was his in spirit at least, as he was hers. He recalled her impassioned avowal of the love she had felt for him before old Zud's clumsy priestly blunder. And then he let the cry of his spirit steal forth.

"Naia! It is Jason calling. Naia, my beloved—appear!"

"Jason—I hear!"

Like a wraith of dreams, it seemed that she stood before him—a form, a figure pure as a blade of silver, emitting a faint auric play of blue and gold. Man and woman they confronted one another, and the moonlight striking upon that divine something he had called from its lovely mansion, set it aquiver and struck through it in a million tiny points of scintillating fire.

"Beloved." Croft stretched forth a dim hand.

It floated toward him.

"Come," he said again, and caught her hand in his, and led her out through the window, where he had entered, under the moon and the stars.

Out, out he led her. They were free as the winds on which it seemed they rode. Like a sheet of molten silver the pool in the garden lay beneath them. About them and beyond them spread the wide panorama of the wooded mountains, marked here and there by the bone-white windings of the road. Beneath them

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swam the wide expanse of the desert. Far off to the east and south, in a ruddy glow, the fire urns of Himyra flared.

CROFT turned his face to that of the shape beside him, and found it the face of a sleeper who sees visions, and knew that though the soul of Naia obeyed him, it was still asleep. "Art afraid?" he questioned gently.

"Nay, Jason, I am not afraid."

Some way the words afforded him a great pleasure, for he knew he would not have had fear in any circumstance whatever, in the spirit he regarded as the complement of his.

"Thy father—would see him?" he questioned once more, deciding upon a further stretching of the astral cord.

"Aye." Naia smiled.

"Behold then!" said Croft, and willed himself toward Himyra, still keeping his companion's hand.

The city glowed beneath them, its fire urns burning up and down the Na in double ranks. The place was white before them. Then—Lakkon lay stretched in slumber on a couch.

"My father!" Naia left Croft's side and seemed to hover all blue and white and gold above him, until as though subconsciously he felt her presence, Lakkon's lips moved and he muttered: "Naia," in his sleep.

"Come," said Croft again, and led her back, since he did not deem it well to risk too long a first excursion.

"Return now to your body as before," he directed when they stood beside it. "Yet remember this when you wake."

For the first time she asked a question of her own volition. "You—are—really Jason?"

"Aye."

"And—your body?"

"Lies in the Zitran pyramid as yours lies here before you. Return into yours, beloved, and I return to mine."

"Aye," she assented. "I return, but—I shall remember—the moonlight—Himyra—my father—and you."

She ceased and suddenly Croft found himself alone. Gone was the radiant form with its aura of gold and purple, its dancing points of fire, which, as he knew, were no more than the never-ceasing, vibrant oscillation of the Pranic sparks—the fires of life—gone, and he stood in the room where Azil spread his wings in a wide-flung benediction and Naia of Aphur lay asleep.

Yet Croft was satisfied if not content, and he felt assured as he willed himself back to Zitra that when she waked in the morning she would recall this first experience as a vivid dream at least.

Indeed as the days went by his major trouble was to curb his own impatience in setting her astral consciousness awake, in refraining from an attempt to progress too fast, in keeping the development he was seeking to produce within her, inside the limits of a well-nigh natural awakening of the greater powers of the soul, in avoiding anything which could in any way resemble a forced growth. Hence, as a sort of brake to his own desire to return too frequently to her, he took up the instruction of Zud, initiating the amazed old man more and more into the mysteries of what he, in his own experience, had proved to be the truth.

Once more, however, he visited Naia, before the elections were held, choosing an afternoon when Zud was engaged in temple duties.

He found her in the vast red-and-yellow paved court of the mountain palace, with Maia beside her, very much as on a former day when he had first visited her in the flesh and spoken to her of love. She lay as then on a wine-red couch, in the sort of diaphanous house-robes women of her class affected, with Maia waving a huge feather fan above her.

Croft smiled as he called her forth, thinking how amazed the blue girl of Mazzer would be if she knew that her arms swayed the fan above an empty tenement of clay, and saying as much to Naia, so that she, too, smiled.

And that day they wandered far over valley and hill, flitting above wooded slopes, loitering sometimes in sun-filled hollows, where flowers of tropic brilliance nodded in the grasses or flaunted their beauty from swaying trailing vines. And from there to the higher places, up, up, hand in hand, to where the eternal snows lay gripped in the clutches of dark peaks and crags.

Until then their communion had been silent save at the first, but the sight of the sparkling snows beneath the sunlight seemed to stir some recollection within Naia's soul.

"It—was here I sent for snows to chill the wines for the banquet to Kyphallos, the time he came from Cathur, by Jadgor's plan," she said.

"That Kyphallos to whom Jadgor would have wed you?" Croft replied.

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She nodded. "Except that I was saved from marriage to a profligate and traitor by"—she paused and appeared to hesitate and went on in a way less certain—"by Jasor of Nodhur."

"Jasor of Nodhur has gone to Zitu," Croft corrected quickly. "You were saved from that fate by me, after Jasor's body became the servant of my spirit, as is your body the servant of your spirit, and changed it to my purpose, made it mine, because your spirit had called me to you as to-day I called you to me."

"Yet I knew you not then as Jason, but as Jasor," Naia faltered. "How then could I call your spirit?"

"Nay," said Croft, "you knew me not, yet felt you never in those days a yearning for some one you had as yet seen never—felt you not yourself already to answer that some one's call, as a woman ripened must answer to her lover?"

"Aye," said his companion slowly. "Ga the eternal spoke to me more than once in such fashion, yet none came to sound the call I should answer until Jasor of Nodhur appeared. Were it your spirit in Jasor's body, you know how the call was answered afterward."

"AM I not like him?" Croft questioned, thrilling at the recollection her words invoked.

"Aye," she confessed. "And when I am with you, it seems that you are he—that you call me to you in spirit, even as he called in the flesh—that I come to you gladly as a maiden to a tryst with him to whom Ga sends her. Yet, when I return to the body beside which even now Maia stands watch, all is confusion when I wake."

"Were you to remember then that in or out of the flesh, it is the spirit calls to the spirit, it were perchance more plain," Croft said.

"Love then is of the spirit only?" She looked into his eyes.

"Yes." Croft nodded. "Love is of the spirit—passion alone of the flesh. Know you not then that it was love called me to you from the earth?"

"Earth?" she repeated. "Aye—Gaya told me somewhat concerning that."

"Come then," said Croft, determining of sudden impulse on a demonstration and seized her by the hand.

Up, up he carried her across the void. The landscape dwindled swiftly away beneath them. Its details faded, became but a sun-smeared blur until Palos whirled on its mighty ball, bedded in a mass of woolly cloud. Up, up. Croft glanced at his companion and found her face wide-eyed. Up, up, as she floated beside him, her slender shape in the void of darkness beyond the atmosphere of Palos beginning to flash and glow with its contained fire. For Croft had willed himself to that one of the moons on which he had first come down from his daring journey from the earth. And now it swung above them. Together they swam toward it, and came to it finding its barren and lifeless crags and plains aglare in the light of Sirius, partly steeped in impenetrable gloom. Across the lighted region Croft led Naia swiftly. They passed from the light.

"Look!" he cried, and pointed to the void of the eternal heavens beyond them, where sparkled the pin-points of a million worlds. "Behold, Palos!" He directed her vision to where the planet rolled, its clouds now turned into what seemed golden fire. "We stand now on one of the moons that light your world at night, beloved. We gaze at your world from its moon, as from earth we gaze at a star—as we gaze at earth as a star from here. By the will of the spirit have we come. By the spirit's will shall we return."

And on his words it was as though Palos rose to meet them, and once more they were back on the crags beside the snows.

"Zitu, may this be permitted?" Naia panted as one shaken by amazement.

"Much," said Croft in answer, "may be permitted to the spirit which seeks truth and dares."

And after that they wandered on, finding a good-sized stream leaping down the side of the mountain not far from Naia's home. Croft seized upon its presence with acclaim. A glance had told him that here was power he could harness to perfect his scheme for generating artificial light, and he sought to explain it to his companion, outlining how by the construction of a series of giant penstocks he would divert the plunging water against wheels to use its force in turning other wheels.

She listened closely and suddenly she laughed. "Now are you as Jasor!" she exclaimed. "It was so he talked concerning his devices before the Zollarian war against which he planned."

"Always have I been as I am now," Jason told her. "Even as Naia of Aphur has always been the same."

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"Always?" she questioned and turned searching eyes upon him.

"Aye, always, and ever will be," he answered, "until Jason and Naia shall be one."

She quivered. Her astral body glowed. Its fires leaped and flamed before him, white and purple and gold. Croft knew that he himself was swayed by a similar emotion and sought to check it lest he overtax her as yet not fully awakened understanding. "Come," he said again, "come," and led her south along the western mountains, exploring them, pointing out their beauties as they passed along.

IT WAS thus he found an outcropping barrier of coal. He spied it and sank upon it, and bent to assure himself that he was not mistaken, and straightened with a radiant face. Here was energy stored for the furnaces he meant to raise across the land ere long. Until now charcoal had been used mainly in the metal trades. But—here—he had a vision of vast smelters once this coal was mined. And the Tamarizians were miners experienced for generations in the handling of ores.

He pointed to his find and explained to Naia that here was fuel.

"Zitu!" she cried in wondering half comprehension. "Would Jason burn a stone!"

"Nay," he said, and made plain the nature of the substance they discussed.

At the end she nodded. "I am convinced," she said. "Him I knew as Jasor was Jason indeed. Your words, your plans are the same. Thanks be to Ga and Azil, I am happy. You, Jason, are he whom I—"

"Love," Croft supplied as once more she faltered.

"Aye, love." For the second time her astral figure glowed with its auric fires. "With you I am happy—free thus and alone, with a strange new happiness—such as I have never known. Canst not hold me thus beside you? Must I return again to the prison of the body? Canst not claim me now, and keep me wholly thine own?"

"No—not yet," Croft stammered, shaken as never before by her words and taking alarm at the mood which was upon her. "Yet, some time I shall claim you mine before all men. Come now, for the present we must return."

Across a twilight sky they flitted back, drifting into the red and yellow paved court where the red and yellow steps ran up at either end to the yellow balcony supported on its carved pillars of red, and the giant figure of a straining man, did battle with a beast not unlike a tiger, to protect a crouching woman from its fangs.

"See!" said Croft. "So shall I fight for you—protect you—guard you, wage warfare against all else for you, until indeed you are mine."

She smiled upon him. "So shall I wait for thee," she began, and broke off sharply: "Behold!"

Croft turned his eyes. Maia knelt the length of her azure form crouched in a posture of woe beside the couch on which Naia's body still reclined. Her arms were thrown out across her mistress's breasts, her face buried from sight between them. Beside her stood Mitlos, gazing on blue girl and white, his entire posture and expression indicative of distress.

"Woe, woe!" Maia wailed in choked accents. "Cursed be Zilla who came upon her in her sleep! She moved not, neither did she speak. Yet when I sought to wake her at the hour for her bath, she answered not to my voice. Again and again I cried to her, 'Naia, my mistress,' yet she did not wake. Mitlos—Mitlos, we are undone. This is not of our doing, yet will Lakkon seek our lives."

"Go," said Croft to the lovely presence beside him. "Spare her alarm. I thought not of your bathing. I have kept you overlong."

And Naia, nodding, lingered for a final question. "Yet—will you come to me again?"

"Yes," said Croft and watched her vanish, watched Naia of Aphur's eyes open, and the bosom beneath Maia's outstretched arms swell slowly, so that the Mazzer girl felt and sprang up, startled, staring, with a starting gaze.

And then he went back to Himyra and sat up on his golden couch and smiled. He had done a good day's work.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE WINGS OF AZIL

THE end of the month following the election found Croft beginning to carry out his material plans. Robur coming to Zitra for the inauguration of Jad-

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gor, bringing Gaya and Naia with him—the latter at Lakkon's request—found time to insist that Jason return to Himyra at once, and institute the work they had before discussed.

Nor to tell the truth was Croft in any way loath. Indeed work was what he craved, rather than a life such as for the past two weeks he had found himself compelled to live in the Zitran pyramid. In addition he felt that the atmosphere of Zitra would be subtly changed once Jadgor was upon the ground, while in Aphur with Robur, his friend and colaborator in his endeavors, the course of his plans would be cleared. Then, too, he was thrilled by the thought of contriving a material meeting with Naia, even more than by anything else. That thought it was which set him to work on the development of electric power first.

Before that, however, he took Zud and journeyed to Scira in a galley, its hull gilded, its sails of azure-blue, with a blue canopy above its after deck, driven by a motor, rather than the oars which had formerly projected from its waist. And at Scira he interviewed Koryphu, the head of the university, regarding the establishment of schools. It was arranged that he should induce Mutlos to take the matter up with Jadgor, and Croft and the high priest sailed south to the mouth of the Na and up its yellow flood.

Then once more Himyra's forges flared as they had flared for the greater part of that strange year before. Robur, democratic despite his royal birth, went with Croft to the shops. In them was posted a notice printed from Jason's original alphabetical blocks, announcing that past the command of the Mouthpiece of Zitu there was no further word. In all things pertaining to the development of the things he had planned Croft found himself supreme. He directed and designed, while at the same time he cultivated the friendship of his superintending captains and their men.

One of his first steps was to set about developing the vein of coal he had discovered. He organized a band of miners and a motor transport train. It was a strange sight when the latter for the first time rolled forth. Robur and he went with it, and saw to the starting of the work. Save for his faith in Jason the new governor of Aphur would have doubted. Laughing, Croft gave him and the staring bands of miners and captains a demonstration, and allayed their doubts. On the second day, after the strippers were uncovering the vein and others of the men were erecting cabins to house the workers, Robur and he drove back.

Copper wire and rubber, or a substitute, were what he next required. The first was easily gained. For generations the Tamarizians had worked in metal, as shown by their couches, their molded doors, their carriages and chariots and their tempered swords and spears. Croft set hundreds of the workers to the task of making wire. The second requirement was far less readily gained. But he did not despair. Aphur's climate was tropical in the main. He believed he might find some vegetable product such as he needed for the insulation of his wires and set about an extensive questioning of the city's learned men. So in the end he learned of a tree which exuded a milk-like sap, in the forests south along the Na. Thither he and Robur went straightway in a motor-driven galley, and the thing was done in theory at least, depending for its practical working out on the efforts of an army of local natives, whom the two set to gathering sap.

Back again in Himyra, save at night, Croft gave himself little rest. And even at night since, on Robur's insistence, he had taken up residence at the palace rather than in the Himyran pyramid, Robur and he discussed their plans, unless the governor was called by his duties somewhere else. Occasionally when this happened, Croft talked with Gaya instead.

In this way he succeeded in winning her sympathetic understanding of his position, even as concerning his love for Naia he had won it once before. And Gaya, whose nature was characterized by a sweet simplicity, questioned him frankly concerning the episode of Naia's attempted suicide in the pool:

"Robur swore by Zitu, he believed you present, in the same guise in which you have told me, you move when your body sleeps."

"Yes, Robur was right," Croft told her and described step by step what had occurred.

The princess nodded. "Now that Lakkon remains with Jadgor at Zitra, the maid grows lonely," she declared. "She has asked me to visit her. May I speak with her concerning these things if she mentions to me her dreams?"

Croft smiled. On Palos, or on earth,

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woman he thought was the same. And Gaya, happy beyond question in the arms of the man of her choice, stood ready to lead or drive Naia, a sister-woman to a mating if she could. And, smiling, he nodded assent, but added a caution. "Yet speak not of it save as of a dream-wife of my true friend. For the growth of the soul must be as the growth of a flower, which the light of truth expands."

HIS wire being made, his rubber gathered, Croft turned next to the harnessing of the mountain stream. He chose copper for his penstocks instead of wood, furnishing specifications to the molders for the sections of the pipe and designing the model of the turbines to be mounted in the pits.

In all things Robur rendered him such assistance as he could, while he never ceased to marvel at the very things he planned. "Mouthpiece of Zitu you are indeed!" he exclaimed again and again, with flashing eyes as some new detail was unfolded to his mind. "Let Jadgor be president at his leisure. Thou and I, my Jason, shall take Tamarizia yet and make it a new world."

And with such a lieutenant Croft found his work advance. Wire was being made in miles, rubber was being delivered in enormous chunks from the commercial galleys down the Na, loaded onto trucks along the quays, drawn by the doglike creatures harnessed to them through the merchandise tunnels beneath the streets and stored in the huge warehouses against future use. Indeed all Himyra, all Aphur hummed at the end of the month, and the founders were beginning to turn out the sections of the giant penstock pipes.

Thereupon Croft collected another train of motors and, organizing a party of road-builders and masons, made his way into the hills to select the site of his power-station on the mountain stream.

At the camp he established beside the mountain torrent he lost no time. Long since he had cast aside Zud's choice of temple dress, for the metal leg-cases, the short-skirted tunic of a military captain, falling half-way down the thighs, and belted at the waist—a costume affording the utmost freedom of movement while he directed the beginning of each task. Habited thus he sat one day on the hillside, watching his laborers digging trenches for the mighty penstocks, preparing the pits for the turbines when, with a crash, through some near-by bushes was thrust a huge animal face.

Open it was, gaping, with a lolling red tongue, and yellow fang-like teeth. For a moment it stared at him panting and then with a bound the whole lithe creature advanced, and flung itself against him as he scrambled to his feet.

"Hai, Hupor!" he cried, recognizing the huge houndlike beast which had fawned upon him once before in Lakkon's mountain house, and excited Naia's comment by the act.

Then as the creature dropped down beside him and turned its eyes, he followed their direction with his own, and found his heart begin a gladdened leaping. A trifle further up the hillside, Naia of Aphur stood between two trees.

Soft climbing sandals of gnuppa hide were on her feet and embraced her tapering calves to just below the knees. Brown was her garment above them, embroidered simply in green. And on her golden hair was a band of brown, supporting a shimmering drape against the heat of the afternoon, and a curling plume green as the leaves above it. In that first glance it seemed to Croft that seen so, she was more beautiful than she had ever been.

He went toward her, his pulses hammering in his ears, the giant beast trailing at his heels.

"Greeting, maid of Aphur!" he said when he stood before her, and bowed deeply from the hips, in formal fashion.

"Hail, Mouthpiece of Zitu!" Naia inclined her head. "Did Hupor break upon your meditations or distract your attention from the work in hand?"

"Hupor and I," said Croft with a glance at the beast, "are friends. Nor is my work a thing requiring such haste, that I may not spare time to admire the fairest work of Zitu's hands."

A swift color mounted into Naia's cheeks. Her glance shifted. "I walk frequently with Hupor," she began a somewhat confused explanation. "The temptation came upon me to inspect the work which I have watched from my father's home for the past three suns, since it began. Hupor, I think, was more surprised to see you than was I."

"You expected to find me?" Croft caught her words up quickly.

"Why not?" she rejoined with an upward flash of her eyes. "Is not the work of Zitu's Mouthpiece under his direction?" Her manner changed, became charged with covert meaning. "And more I dreamed."

"Dreamed?" Croft repeated, striving to

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still a rising tumult in his breast, at what seemed a challenging of his spirit by hers.

"Nay, I know not," she said almost faintly, while her white lids quivered above each purple iris. "But it was as though one told me this stream was to be used to bring new light to Himyra—that such was a part of your plans."

"Yes," he said, "it is—to Himyra, and to Lakkon, thy father's house, if so you desire, and to all of Aphur, all of Tamarizia in time. If so you saw it, it would appear as a vision rather than a dream, maid of Aphur. Come and I will show you its beginning and explain."

FOR an hour after that she wandered with him, and watching her now and then, Croft surprised a puzzled expression on her face. Yet he said no definite word, since he knew that the leaven of his past acts was working in her, was slowly rising up until at last it should wake her fully to the truth.

"It were hardly fitting, were Lakkon's daughter not to offer to Zitu's mouthpiece the freedom of Lakkon's house," she said at the last, when Croft had escorted her back to the mountain valley wherein the palace was placed. And her tone was vaguely wistful—there was something in her eyes that cried out to him, wholly unlike that blue fire of scorn they had held, when she flung the betrothal seal of Azil against his breast.

"Jason, the Mouthpiece, shall do himself the honor of Lakkon's house, when Lakkon is within it," he replied with meaning, as he bowed and turned and left her, and heard her catch her breath.

Yet he took with him a song in his heart because of the invitation which had faltered from her lips; because as he knew now the cry of spirit to spirit was beginning to actuate the flesh. And he walked more as a god indeed than a man as he made his way back to his workmen, threading his way on springing feet, glorying in the strength of his free-limbed stride on the wooded slopes, holding in his heart the knowledge that it was because she had felt he would be present—because of an urge to be near him, to speak with him as man and woman, that she had come to view the new work.

But he did not attempt to approach her again in the astral condition during the week longer that he remained at the site of the power-plant. Nor did Naia venture to it any more. And so soon as he was satisfied that his subordinates understood the exact scope of their duties, he returned to set about the actual construction of the dynamo that, water driven, should light Himyra with a myriad of glowing lamps.

But that night, after he had received Robur's report of progress, and they had talked over the dynamo plans, he sought his own apartment and stretched himself upon his couch. And then he went seeking the two women who in all his life he had known the best, because he thought that it would be on this first night, with Gaya, that Naia would unburden herself.

Failing to find them in the palace, he sought and found them in the garden, seated on a carved bench of stone, inside the vine-grown walls of the pool. Naia's eyes were fixed upon its surface, silvered by the light of Palos's moons. Very wide and dark they seemed beneath the shadow of her hair. Her lips moved.

"Whether these be dreams, induced by those things of which you told me, or whether too much thinking has tired my mind until it makes of vain imaginings the seeming of other thought, I know not," she said in a musing voice. "Yet even as you said, he had told my cousin Robur that he left his body, so has it seemed to me that I left my flesh, when he called me to him—that hand in hand we wandered forth together, to Himyra—over the mountains, and once that we leaped all space, as he says his spirit leaped from earth to Palos and stood upon the larger of the moons up yonder, whose light sparkles here on the pool."

"ZITU!" Gaya's tones were a trifle unsteady—filled with a certain awe, as Croft waited her answer. "But—Naia, sweet maid, may not dreams embody truth?"

"If dreams they be, I think it may be so," her companion rejoined. "For on that time we went to Himyra as it seemed, I saw my father asleep, and he whispered my name, and the next time he came to me he spoke to me about it; said that he saw me standing beside him and had called me.

"And,"—abruptly her soft voice took on the speaking semblance of a child—"Gaya—the night was the same—on which I had my dream. And again on an afternoon when it seemed he called me, and we wandered over hill and valley, where flowers bloomed, and up to the

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everlasting snows, it seemed also that on returning Maia thought that I had died, and he bade me back into my body, promising to come to me again. And when I woke, Maia and Mitlos stood beside me, in tears and terror, thinking my spirit flown. Gaya—how explain such things as these?"

"I may not tell you," Gaya faltered. "In these days since Zitu's mouthpiece came among us, Aphur and all Tamarizia have witnessed wondrous sights, have dreamed of undreamed truths."

"Mouthpiece of Zitu," Naia repeated, turning to face her companion. "I like not the name. Jason, he calls himself to me in my dreams, and as Jason I prefer to think of him—as Jason, a man, and—and—my lover. Ah, Gaya, should I blush for such a thought?"

"Nay—thou art a woman, ripe for loving," Gaya reassured her quickly. "And to women, be they fit, I think that Ga herself sends dreams."

"Dreams!" Abruptly Naia clenched a fist and struck the tapered outline of her thigh. "Dreams—aye, dreams they must be, Gaya—for to me he came no more again. Only when I thought not of his coming did it happen, and since, when I have called him, sought once more to sleep and find him, it is vain. Yet if I be shameless, let me speak the same. Greater happiness have I never known since I tore the seal of Azil from my girdle, than when in my sleep he called me to him, and I answered and saw him standing before me in my chamber, fair as Azil himself, with his form shot through by the soft light of the moon. Or, when I slept and Maia fanned me, and he came and led me into the outer world, where we wandered in far places, he and I alone."

"You saw him while he was in the mountains?" Gaya asked as her companion paused, causing Croft to smile as he saw her intent to learn what he himself had not told.

"Yes—what am I saying? Gaya, I forget myself, even as that day I forgot myself and bade him to my father's house." Suddenly she broke off to throw her arms about Gaya's neck and bury her face, gone white in the silver moonlight, against her breast.

"And—" the arms of the older woman crept about her.

"He replied he would enter it when Lakkon was within it," Naia told her in a smothered voice.

"As he would were he careful of your honor." Gaya held her close. "Child, when my visit is ended, you must return with me to Himyra, nor longer spend your time in dreams and thoughts."

"But—" Naia sat up abruptly. Her question came with a sweetly feminine inconsistence. "Would he not think I sought his presence, were I to accompany you to the palace?"

"Are you not Robur's cousin?" Gaya answered. "Can he expect you to remain forever in your father's house?"

Croft's smile was very tender as he turned away. Time and those "dreams" of hers were fighting his battle for him in Naia's soul. And had he need of other assistance in winning the one woman he desired in a million worlds or years, Gaya was his lieutenant. He blessed her as he returned to Himyra, for that propinquity of Naia and himself in the future, that feminine endeavor at match-making, for which he now knew that she schemed.

CHAPTER XIII

NEW MARVELS

THAT Zitran, too, ran past. During it word came from Zitra that Jadgor had approved and recommended for acceptance by the national assembly that scheme for a chain of schools among the masses, Mutlos of Cathur had introduced. Thereupon Croft and Jadgor selected several expert metal molders and set them to work at making type, and Jason choosing some of the skilled workmen whom he had trained to exact methods in making the motors, months before, directed them now in the building of a rather simple set of presses in which the type should be used.

Also looking to the future he commanded others of the motor mechanics to begin the construction of a half dozen engines of a somewhat different design. Questioned by Robur as to his purpose, he explained that these were destined to finish the lifting power for the first Tamarizian airplanes.

"Zitu! Zitu!" exclaimed the governor of Aphur, flashing his perfect teeth; "I doubt you not, Jason, but my wonder does not cease. Recall you the morning when you drove the first motor through the streets of Himyra and well nigh frightened the civic guards to death?" He smiled, and Jason laughed. And then he sobered.

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"Yes," he replied. "And I recall also how the same morning, Chythron, Lakkon's driver, lost control of the gnuppas and they bolted, and I spoke with Naia, thy fair cousin, first."

Robur nodded. He laid a hand on his companion's arm. "Fear not," he admonished in sympathetic understanding. "Though the maid repel you because of a lack of understanding, yet shall she come to you at length."

"Aye," Croft looked the other man full in the eyes with meaning. "Once more shall I place Azil's sign upon Naia of Aphur's girdle."

Yet to all outward seeming he appeared immersed in his work, and even as the dynamo and the turbines took shape, he sent men into the vast plain that stretched between Himyra and the mountains of Aphur, to a spot of his selection, and bade them build there a huge shed to house his airplane fleet. Still others he set on the fashioning of ribs for the wings of the planes themselves, to building the fuselage bodies out of sheets of copper, and after a consultation with the local caste of weavers, he picked on a fabric for the wings.

And with all his ceaseless activities he still found time in a whimsical mood to inaugurate among his workmen a series of recreation and games lest under the driving of Robur and himself the sweating laborers grow stale. Indeed, he introduced a sort of competitive spirit in the various shops, organizing from the members of each a separate club and matching them one against the other in their sports. And of all the games on which he might have picked, Jason Croft, Mouthpiece of Zitu, and virtual commander of the remaking of a nation, chose baseball!

In this he gave his at times bizzare fancy full rein. The balls were fashioned from well-turned gnuppa hide, about a rubber core, with a covering of string. The bats were of tough resilient wood, which the new devotees of the pastime swung with might and main.

Then for the first time on Palos were heard the crack of the batsman lining out a clean drive, and the cry of the umpire, Croft himself at first: "Ball four—take a free pass! Strike—one!"

And because even the most serious mind must find relaxation at times, Croft found he enjoyed the matches between teams immensely, while Robur entered with almost animal spirits into the rivalry of the games, and nearly pestered the life out of Jason, trying to master the intricacies and comprehend the casual principles involved in curves, in and outshoots, drops and breaks, after he had seen them first. Indeed Jason had more than one laugh after he discovered Robur in the bathing court of the palace one morning, hurling a ball against a backstop he had arranged, and trying to learn to throw it around a corner, as he somewhat naively explained.

But if Robur did not accomplish his purpose, several of the pitchers eventually did to some extent, and Robur got a laugh of his own, when one of them whom he had secretly had Jason coach in the copper foundry team, was produced. The batter who happened to be up swung sharply at what looked like a slow and easy delivery, and Aphur's governor chuckled for days because the fellow very nearly broke his neck when his bat failed to find the ball where he thought it was.

CROFT'S main satisfaction, however, in the success of the innovation lay in the fact that from rivalry in the game it was but a step to rivalry between the various corps of laborers in the shops. He took that step and introduced a system of bonuses and holidays for increased production or extra-efficient work. And because the Tamarizians were a pleasure-loving people, the plan was a success from the first. Working three shifts, as he had before the Zollarian war, Croft found his plans progress. Five weeks—the length of a Zitran—after his return from the mountains, found his turbines finished, his dynamo ready to be transported and assembled in its appointed place.

That place was ready to receive it as Croft knew from several trips he had taken to it, in one of his swiftest motors. A stone power-house had been erected, the penstocks were in place. Diverting gates were prepared to turn the stream into them at the proper moment, and send it roaring through the turbines in the pits. Telling Robur to send men into the mountains to cut poles, and giving him a model of insulators to be made of glass, Jason loaded the sections of his dynamo upon his fleet of transports and set forth again on his journey to the hills.

Thereafter for two weeks he toiled and sweated, thankful at least for the fact that in Tamarizia labor was plentiful,

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and regulated by government control in regard to wages, carefully estimated on a living scale, so that the dissatisfaction and continual strikes of earth were unknown. The condition enabled him to command what workmen needed, and rest assured of a steady advance in the projects he undertook.

More than once in that long, hot fourteen suns, Robur drove out to inspect the progress made and marvel, and report the insulators being turned out in satisfactory shape, and the poles coming down from the hills on creaking motor trucks. Croft gave him drawings to guide him in setting up a line of power poles across the desert from Himyra toward the mountains, and at night, when his weary workmen were sleeping, plunged into the task of devising Tamarizia's first electric lights. At first he confined his plans to small-sized arcs, intending to give public demonstration before he went on with the attempt to devise incandescents for inside use.

Coal was coming down from the vein he had discovered by now in quantity sufficient to use in the copper smelters, and he decided to gain his carbons, from this, converted into coke. After several nights of intensive working, he pushed aside his finished plans and drew a long breath of relief. The thing was done.

Croft's eyes flashed. This enlightenment of a people and a nation was becoming well nigh an obsessing delight in his brain. It partook almost of the nature of creation despite the fact that he knew those things he was producing were but crude copies of familiar things he had formerly known as concomitants of life. For, as he had said to Robur, and to Zud, and to Naia herself, he was a man—was human in all his impulses and feelings regardless of the marvelous control of the spirit he had learned, and he thrilled with a personal satisfaction in the success of each new endeavor, the wonder each new product of his scheming excited in other brains.

From Robur he learned that Gaya had returned to the palace, bringing Naia with her for an indefinite stay. That, indeed, was in accordance with his plans. For so soon as he had realized that Gaya meant to throw the girl and himself into a closer association, as he did after the conversation he had heard between the two women, he had purposely meant to be absent from Himyra himself when the woman he loved arrived.

Croft would not have been either where or what he was had he been devoid of a vast psychological knowledge. And deep as were his own emotions, strong as was his own impulse to indulge a desire for Naia's closer presence, yet in all he did at that time he followed a deliberately mapped-out course for the accomplishment of his purpose.

During those days, as her words to Gaya had shown him very clearly, Naia of Aphur's mental condition was one of vague unrest. And the principle cause of that unrest was, as Croft knew, himself.

The new estrangement between them, her act in returning his betrothal jewel in so dramatic a manner, those subsequent excursions into the unknown world of the astral plane which he had brought about, and which she was as yet unable to consider other than as vagaries of a sleeping brain, had induced within her a state of introspection which, even more than his immediate presence, he felt sure must serve his purpose best.

She had cried out in a sympathy seeking confusion to the wife of his friend, that she had sought him that day in the mountains, as a sort of test—a means of convincing herself if her visioning were false or real. She had admitted that, even despite her former reluctance to consider a possible mundane love between Croft in his present body and herself, he had appealed to her that day in his physical form and strength. And she had complained that he had not kept the promise given by his astral form to hers, to return to her so again; had confessed that she had sought for a renewal of those two former meetings, had tried to repeat her "dreams."

JASON CROFT, erecting his dynamo, harnessing it to his turbines with heavy beltings of gnuppa hide, felt that the very desire he had wakened in Naia's soul, would do its work better while it remained unsatisfied, would gain in strength as the days passed into weeks, would receive an added poignancy when she arrived at Himyra and found him gone again to the hills, engaged without any seeming distraction attributable to herself, on his work.

For Croft knew very, very well that one of the great laws of all mating consists in this—that until mating itself is accomplished, one element retreats, while the other as constantly seeks, be-

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fore desire itself in the one awakens desire in the other, and thereby bringing both elements together, strikes out of them life's fire.

Yet, night after night, his work finished, stretched on a rough couch, Croft yearned for this woman of all the worlds to his soul. Night after night he lay picturing her as he had known her, revealing their every association together, from his first sight of her in her father's carriage, to those two weird astral meetings which had occurred. He pictured her beauty of face and form—the supple strength of the latter, its litheness, its wonderful grace. He saw it in his mind's eye as he had seen it time and again in life.

And there were times when he quivered, and stretched out his arms which throbbed with a strange, numb aching, remembering as it seemed in their very substance, the soft, warm pressure of her flesh, the glory of her former surrender to the caress of their embrace. There were times when his lips writhed as he recalled their first meeting with her mouth—that quick, spontaneous giving and taking of a kiss, before she had cried out that now—now—he must win her, or else by the customs of her country, she stood a maid disgraced—had cried it, and yet before she left him on that same occasion, had crept to him, inviting a second kiss.

And though at such things Croft thrilled as may any man thrill, at the thought of the one woman who can drive him to madness as a man, yet unlike the ordinary mortal he thrilled still more at the beauty of her soul. For unlike the customary lover, Croft had seen it—and because of his knowledge of such matters, because he knew the meanings in a spiritual sense of certain vibrations—because he could interpret the meaning involved in auric colors—he knew that only a chastely pure spirit possessed an aura of blue and gold. Wherefore great as was his glory in his recollections of her physical beauty and charm, greater still was his exaltation recalling how even like her golden hair and purple eyes, that glorious image of her being he had twice called from it, glowed.

Glorious was she in body, beautiful in soul. And Croft lying while the night wrapped the mountain, and the stream, plunging over the rocks in its bed, sent its murmur to his ears, renewed once more his purpose, and swore by all the highest forces in his conception, that ere this thing was finished, that glory and beauty should be his. But in his own way—the true way—the way in which two chemical atoms might come together—gladly—almost unconsciously because of compelling force, affinity, desire—let the word used be what it might since in the great law of Zitu or God, they were the same. And it was so Croft meant to claim that woman, body and soul, whom he felt was his true twin—that glorious complement of his entire nature—that lode star of his being who had drawn him to her—across the empty void between the stars.

On the fourteenth day Robur came up from Himyra at Croft's request. Jason met him as he descended from his motor and led him into the newly constructed power-house. There, on a masonry and copper base, insulated by a heavy plate of glass, stood what was as yet Tamarizia's most wonderful device. Bolted and belted to the driving-gear of the turbine it stood, waiting but the driving force of the waters through a penstock to wake it into life.

Croft's eyes blazed with something of excitement as he gestured toward it. "Behold, Rob," he said, "with this shall we harness the lightnings and bid them do our will. With this shall we light the streets of Himyra and the fire-urns along the Na, and the palace, the houses of all men in Himyra first, in all Aphur at the last. With this shall we ere we are done, drive the wheels in many shops, which now are turned by men and beasts in treadmills or upon the windlass bars. So shall it come at last that by the mere pressure of a hand upon a lever those wheels shall move. These things I promise you, Rob—behold." He waved a hand to a captain standing by the door of the house. And he in turn signaled to a workman not far off. And he, who had been waiting, lifted a trumpet to his lips and blew a blast. It was the sign on which Croft had agreed for the men high up on the mountain to open a penstock gate.

YET for a moment there was nothing to mark the effect, until with a whisper, rising to a roar, the huge pipe filled and discharged its plunging contents against the waiting wheel. Then, as the wheel turned and the belt of gnuppa hide revolved, there crept through the new rock house a strange

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and droning hum. Louder and louder it rose, as faster and faster the shining armature which Croft and Robur watched spun round. Faster and faster, louder and louder—blue sparks began to shine and quiver under the copper brushes. And suddenly, with a blinding scintillation, a hissing crash, a giant spark leaped the gap between the terminals of two wires Croft had arranged to test the ascending charge.

"Zitu!" Above the crackling discharge the captain in the door cried out: "Fly—we are undone, man of Zitu—fly!" He staggered back and paused and stood staring, vaguely reassured at the smile of triumph on Croft's face.

"Fear not," Jason told him quickly, as he struck up a lever, released the tension of the belt, and caused the first dynamo on Palos to sink from a dizzy whirling toward rest. "This moment speaks success for all our toil of weeks. Go tell the men on the pipes to close the gates."

Robur's face, too, was pale, well nigh as that of the captain's, though he had held his place. His lips were close pressed, however, and his nostrils slightly pinched. Then, as Croft so easily chained the fiery breathing of the monster he had produced, his eyes began to flash.

"By Zitu, and by Zitu!" he swore the Tamarizian oath of wonder. "Jason, you have indeed harnessed His own lightning, as you have said. For a moment I feared that His wrath were excited by your daring, and He had sent a bolt of His fire to destroy us, with the house." He broke off with an almost shamefaced laugh.

"Yet now it gentles like a wild gnuppa under its master's hand," he went on again as the dynamo stopped and naught remained save the dwindling rush of the waters through the waste pipes from the turbine beneath their feet. "Zitu, my friend, but all men shall marvel yet as I do now at this! What plan you next?"

"Light!" said Croft. "Light, first, and after that to make use in all the ways I mentioned of this force—to turn the wheels in shops, to run the presses I have made to print from type and so supply the schools Jadgor has favored with the means of broadening men's minds—to print for them and their children, and so to spread the truth."

"Thou wilt build a city here to do these things?" Robur questioned, as yet unable to fully sense quite all Croft's words embraced.

"No," Jason told him. "This power shall flow from here to Himyra, Rob, across the line of poles your men are building, along the wires."

"Zitu!" The governor of Aphur stared.

Croft smiled. "To-morrow," he went on, "I return to Himyra to arrange for the making of lights, and a demonstration of their working when the time is ripe." And suddenly his whole face lighted at an inward thought. "Naia—Rob. Tell me of her." For suddenly at the mention of his return her picture had leaped before him; the certainty had come upon him that in Himyra he should meet her, speak to her, dwell beneath the roof of the same house. And the accomplishment at which Robur, of Himyra, was staring in awestruck wonder—the great dynamo, successful in its primary test, and all it stood for—sank into nothingness before the thought. Naia of Aphur's face, the hinted perfume of her presence, blotted it out.

"Thou wilt see her," said Robur—"of course." It was as though he read Croft's thought. "And could you see her now as each sun I see her, perchance you would feel as do I, that she will be glad of your coming now at last. Like one without purpose she moves, Jason, my strange friend, whom I love as no other man, yet do not understand. There is the look of one who waits for one who comes not in her eyes. In their purple depths they hold a question ever that makes them doubly dark. Yet if at times I say I am driving forth to meet you, I have seen her lay a white hand over Ga's snowy fountain beneath her robe. I have seen her lips part as though to speak or question concerning thee, and having returned, I have known that her ears were like thirsty lips to drink in what reports I made regarding the progress of your work. Yet in such mood is she sweeter, more desirable as it seems to me, than ever in her life."

Croft nodded. "Not more desirable to me," he said, "than the first sun whereon I saw her. To-day I place a guard and send the workmen back to Himyra. To-morrow I shall come."

CHAPTER XIV

BEATING WINGS

NAIA of Aphur— Naia! He was now to meet her again in the flesh. The thought held Croft as he drove toward

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Himyra the next day. He was to meet her, as at Zitra, not as in the mountains beside the stream he had harnessed to his and Tamarizia's purpose, but in Robur's palace, where, like himself, she was a guest—under conditions where the conventions of social life, not so far unlike those of earth, since human nature is, after all, very much the same, would compel a certain courtesy in their association at least.

Toward that meeting he went more like an ardent lover than anything else. Once in the palace, he sent for a barber and had his hair carefully trimmed. For an hour after that he lay while a Mazzerian masseur rubbed softening oils into his skin. And then he dressed in a costume he had ordered made when he returned from Zitra first, unlike old Zud's robes, and of his own designing—a costume of golden leg cases studded with sapphire-hued stones—an undervest of gossamer tissue—a short skirt of a heavier material, white in color, with a silken sheen, and a cuirass of gold and silver, with the wings of Azil and the cross ansata, inlaid on the breast-plate in more of the sapphire-like gems. Of gold and silver was his helmet topped with a crest of azure plumes. Robur came in upon him, having barely returned from the shops, as he put it on.

"Zitu!" he exclaimed, pausing to stare at his friend, and went on: "Jason, thou art a sight—"

"A sight, yes—" Croft cut him short; with a heightened color. He laughed. "Rob—there are times when your tongue reminds me of speech on earth. Were I there at this moment, they would name me a *sight* indeed."

A smile twitched Robur's lip as he caught the unaccustomed meaning. "And at times I find a strange application of meaning in thy words, Jason," he replied. "It is so in the manner of speech you use concerning the games of baseball when the contest waxes warm. 'Tear its hide off! Lay on that pill! Lean on it! Lean on it!'—the word 'charley-horse' which you sometimes employ, and the naming of an arm a 'wing.' None the less thou art a sight to gladden a maiden's eyes, my friend, and even now a maid and a matron await thee beside the bathing pool. So—get thee gone! Thou art beautiful enough."

With another laugh Croft took him at his word, descending to the court where the swimming pool sparkled in the late afternoon sunlight, and advancing in a considerable blaze of material glory to where, on couches beneath a shimmering awning, Gaya and Naia reclined.

"Hai, Jason!" Robur's wife exclaimed, extending a hand as she saw him. "Welcome, thou tamer of the lightning, as my lord has said thou art. Wilt pardon a matron's indolence, or should I greet thee on my feet?"

"Nay." Croft took her hand and bent above it. "I like thee less, wife of Robur, in the formal mood. Retain the charm of thy ease." Then deliberately he turned his eyes and met those of Naia. "Greeting to thee, maid of Aphur," he said.

"And to thee, Mouthpiece of Zitu," she returned with her pansy-purple eyes fixed on the flashing symbol on his breast.

Croft noted the glance, the slight tensing of the lines about her mouth as he sat down. He had meant from the first to note its effect. Indeed, he had worn it to this meeting of a purpose. It was his intent that, in spite of it, and all it stood for, or had stood for at one time in her mind, her surrender should be gained.

"As to the harnessing of Zitu's fire, 'tis no more than a following out of Zitu's law when understood," he turned to Gaya to explain. "The generation of 'elektricity,' as it is called, is no more in this case than the changing of one force into another, a transfer of energy from—"

"Ah, Ga, I am a woman, unversed in such matters!" Gaya exclaimed with a dancing in her eyes. "I fear I am too old to learn. Naia is of a younger generation, her mind of softer substance; grave thy meaning on its tablet with the stylus of thy tongue. I would see Robur before the evening meal. It were time he had returned."

"Aye," said Croft, smiling and rising to assist her to her feet. "Even now he is within the palace. We spoke before I came forth."

He watched while she hurried importantly away, still smiling inwardly at her palpable subterfuge for leaving Naia and him alone; then turned to where Lakkon's daughter still reclined, and resumed his seat.

"You have heard from Zitra?" he inquired.

"Aye," she said, and went on with the

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information: "Lakkon, my father, and Jadgor are blessed by Zitu with good health. My cousin's wife informs me Jadgor has given sanction to thy plans for schools."

"My plans?" Jason countered the indirect accusation. "Was not the matter presented by Mutlos of Cathur?"

"Aye." The pansy-purple eyes grew somewhat narrow. "Mutlos—a man of the people, who writes not his own name upon the tablets, suggests that the people be taught to read the characters heretofore known to few save the nobles and the priests. And Koryphu of Scira joins hands with Mutlos to support the project. Thus inside a few Zitrans after a thousand cycles in Tamarizia—" The ivory shoulder above her left breast twitched in something like a shrug of her own words of rejection. "Thus, on its face, the thing appears. Also, Robur last night came with a marvelous tale of your latest success. Zitu—one succeeds where another only dreams."

"Success," said Croft, looking directly at her, "consists very largely, Princess Naia, in refusing to be denied."

FOR a moment she endured his steady contemplation, and then her lids drooped, she picked at a fold of her garment. "And you succeed? You refuse to be—denied?"

"Yes, by Zitu!" her companion told her quickly. "I refuse to question the possibility of aught which Zitu permits or ordains."

And suddenly Naia of Aphur threw up her head in an almost haughty gesture. "As were fitting, being Mouthpiece of Zitu," she made answer, "speak further. Tell me of your plans."

Womanlike, she had touched him on a soft spot. Croft blazoned forth. And though now in all things mortal he was Tamarizian indeed—still he was a man—and because of the peculiar circumstances leading up to his present position, he still clung to many of the habits in thought of earth. Furthermore he had planned at some length the night before concerning the manner of his demonstration of electricity to Himyra. And in those plans he had put all his eggs in one basket, more or less. He had planned to make it what on earth he might have called "some time."

Hence he ignored Naia's evasion of what had been growing into more or less a tense situation, fell in with her suggestion, and began a delineation of his designs. And despite herself, as he went on, Naia, being a typical Aphurian and, like her people, one of a pleasure-loving race, found her interest quicken, her somewhat formal pose forgotten, her brain filled with pictures never beheld before; so that long before he had finished her eyes began to shine.

"Himyra shall see sights such as she has never witnessed," Croft declared. "I shall make lights. Already for them the plans are drawn. Lamps they shall be of glass and metal, which, when the new force shall pass through them, shall glow, yet without emitting any smoke or flame. These first I shall show at a public celebration, in small numbers. Later they shall flare from one end of Aphur to the other. Yet before I present them to the people, I shall have completed yet another device which shall be for a part of the celebration—a machine which, like the motors across the desert, shall fly through the air."

He went on, lost in the joy of portraying his intentions to her, and described the airplane, drawing in graphic words a verbal outline of each part, from the metal fuselage to the wings.

It was then for the first time that Naia interrupted. And not as an interruption, but in their nature her words were surprising in a way. Gradually as Croft described the airplane he meant to build, her whole expression had changed, had grown wide-eyed and parted of lip, a thing of rapt attention, until as he paused, with the promise of himself riding the air at the coming celebration, she exclaimed:

"Thou wouldst be as a bird in thy daring, and the birds I have often yearned to follow! To rise like them, singing in broad circles against the sun, or with beating wings to breast some cloudy storm. Zitu permitting"—she lifted herself on her couch, and her whole form seemed to expand with the thrill of the conception—"I myself would delight to fly with these thy wings."

"Thou?" Croft found that her wish both upset and thrilled him. The spontaneous flare of daring it mirrored forth, the flash of the lovely eyes that accompanied its expression, the light of its thought on her face, all woke a quick admiration. But—the following consideration of her glorious life exposed to the perils of the undertaking roused something like consternation in him.

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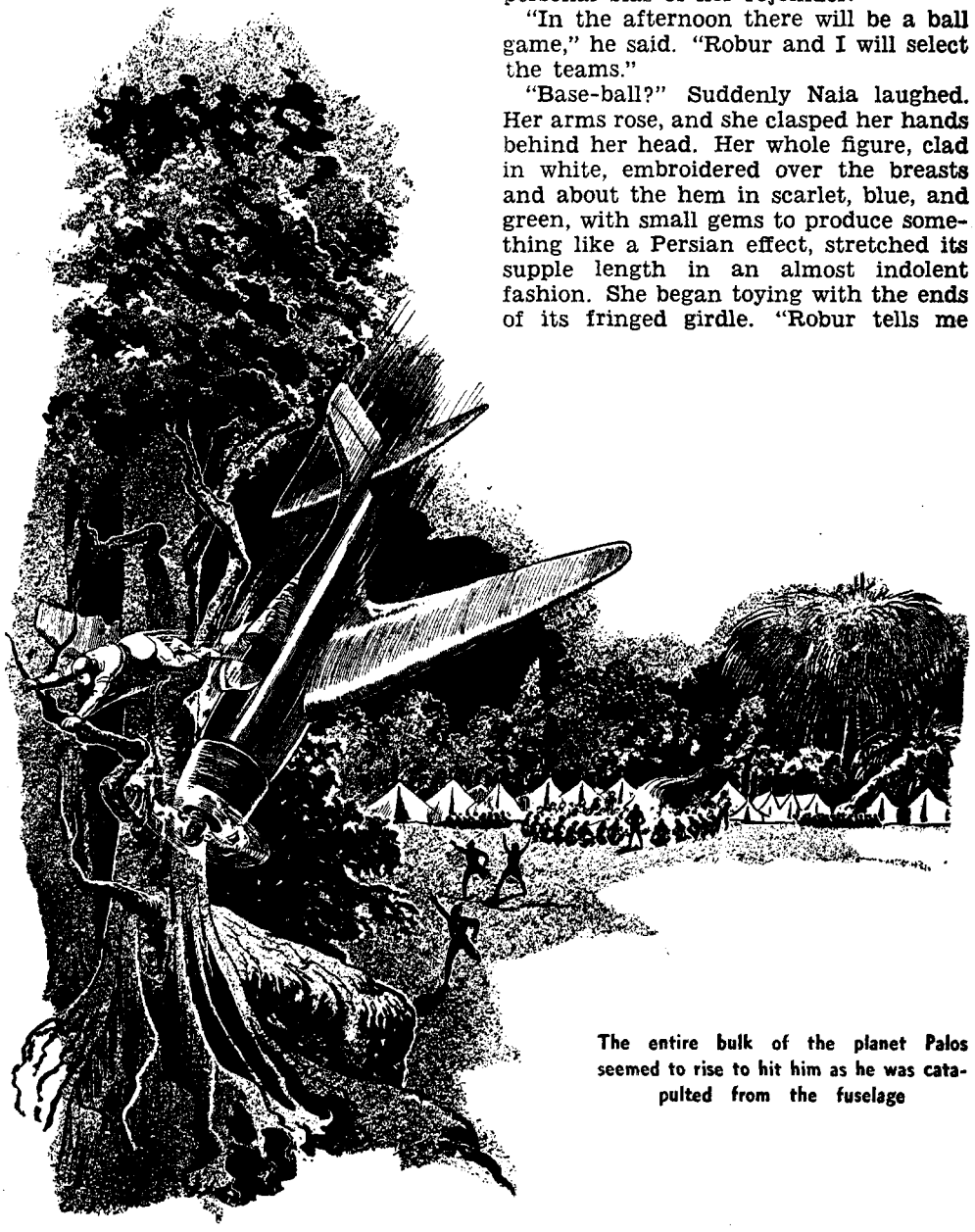
And as the thought clouded his face and he stammered forth his interrogatory exclamation, Naia relaxed the tension of her figure, reclining again on the couch. "Nay," she said, "if it fills you with displeasure, forget my overquick speech. There shall be new light in Himyra, and Zitu's Mouthpiece shall ride above all men's heads, on the wings of his devising, that they may behold him and wonder at his wisdom. What else?"

Mentally, Croft winced at the subtle turn of her words. Almost it seemed to him that she purposely misunderstood his hesitation, seeking thereby to mask the temporary loss of her own pose, the well-nigh forward interest she had displayed. But, aside from an inward emotion, he gave no sign that he noted the personal bias of her rejoinder.

"In the afternoon there will be a ball game," he said. "Robur and I will select the teams."

"Base-ball?" Suddenly Naia laughed. Her arms rose, and she clasped her hands behind her head. Her whole figure, clad in white, embroidered over the breasts and about the hem in scarlet, blue, and green, with small gems to produce something like a Persian effect, stretched its supple length in an almost indolent fashion. She began toying with the ends of its fringed girdle. "Robur tells me



The entire bulk of the planet Palos seemed to rise to hit him as he was catapulted from the fuselage

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'tis a game you brought with you from —earth."

Abruptly Croft became aware of the scrutiny of her eyes, for the space of a heartbeat, then they were again inspecting her girdle's fringe

"Yes," he answered. sensing that once more she was groping for some sign in his words or manner "Have you witnessed a game?"

Naia nodded, without looking up. "Robur insisted, after he had contrived to throw a ball through my chamber window and drop it into the mirror pool with a most surprising splash, to say nothing of waking me with the water in my face."

CROFT smiled. He suspected Rob had been continuing his experiments with the intricacies of curves.

"Since then," Naia went on. "I have been seeking to aid him in the mornings with something he desires to learn. It seems that he declares a ball may be thrown so that it changes its direction in the air, and I confess that, watching one of the team pitchers whom he pointed out at a game, it appeared that it was done. We have risen and worked for several mornings together; but, besides breaking two windows and some flower urns, we have little to show for our pains. Gaya declares he will destroy the palace unless you teach him the trick on your return."

"I shall join you in the morning," said Jason, laughing, as her red lips smiled.

Naia regarded the arches of her pink feet, bared save for sandals of scarlet gnuppa leather, caught about her slender ankles by silver bands, to which were linked chains of silver running up on either side of the heel and between the toes. "Then," said she, "shall I let you take the ball when he throws it. I confess it burns my hands. As to this new light—what does it burn, since it neither smokes nor flames?"

"A substance," said Croft, "made from koal." And now as he spoke he watched his companion in turn. And suddenly he met her eyes in a glance that thrilled —a glance that spoke of recollection. that seemed for an instant to flash him a voiceless question, yet one whose meaning to him was plain. And for a moment it seemed that an actual question trembled on the lips of the perfect mouth he watched, before Naia spoke in an almost breathless fashion.

"Koal—the strange, black stone you have set men to digging in the region to the west? Jason—how knew you where to find what, before your coming, in all Aphur was unknown?"

Croft's heart leaped, both at what he felt was the animus back of the query, and the fact that now, for the first time to him in the unity of soul and body, she had used his name. And suddenly daring the issue, he let his eyes sweep from her golden head to pink-nailed toes, in a glance that was subtly like a caress, before he answered slowly: "I came upon its locality on a day when my body lay sleeping and my spirit wandered as you have heard that it does. Some might say that Zitu showed it to me—in a dream."

Naia of Aphur went pale. Her color faded. One of her hands crept up and lay above her heart. For a moment she plainly struggled for control, and then she faltered: "A dream, say you—a dream?"

Croft nodded. "Yes. Did you not speak to me yourself of one such, in which you had learned of my intent concerning the use of water to bring new light to Himyra? Said you not as much the afternoon of that sun on which you and Hupor came upon me by the stream?"

"Oh, aye—oh, aye, indeed." Naia's tone was listless, weary. "Yet am I not Mouthpiece of Zitu. Who am I to dream?"

And suddenly Jason Croft caught a breath deep into his lungs. Close to the borderland between spirit and body were they in that moment, and he knew it—close, very close. A little more thought, a little more pondering and questioning of itself, and this girl's spirit must spread the wings of the soul in conscious understanding of the truth. His eyes lighted at the recognition of that fact. His nostrils tensed a trifle about the angle at thought of all it must mean.

"No, Mouthpiece of Zitu are you not called," he said. "Nor is there any mouthpiece of Zitu, save through the soul of man. Yet are you daughter of Ga, and a woman, through whom man's soul must pass before man be man indeed. Thou art the door between man and Zitu, and in so much nearer than man to him."

Then for a moment he paused and sat with a fear beginning to stir within him lest he had dared too much. For she said nothing, nor moved. Nor did she look at him, or, as he fancied, at

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any objective thing. She lay reclining, her body rising and falling to a long, slow rhythm of breathing, her gaze directed off across the shimmering ripple of the pool. But as he watched, her expression softened, became rapt — as though the purple eyes beneath her long-fringed lashes were beholding what save to herself was an invisible thing. Her lips moved without sound. But Croft, reading their motion, knew that they framed two of his own words: "The Door."

"Yes—the door—above which Azil spreads his wings," Croft repeated softly.

Once more he broke off and sat waiting. Because his words had been almost an allusion to the betrothal gift of Tamarizian men to their women—that seal of Azil she had torn from her girdle and returned in scorn to him. And that she would understand it, considering how largely symbolism entered into Tamarizian speech, he felt assured.

Nor was he kept long in suspense. Naia's steady breathing broke its rhythm. With a lithe movement she first sat up on the couch, then lifted herself to her feet. Her eyes turned toward him. The introspective light was gone from their blue depths. They blazed with a purple fire. "Enough!" she panted as she faced him. "Friend thou art of my cousin, and friend art thou to his wife. Mouthpiece of Zitu art thou to my nation, and as such I yield you my respect. Yet speak not any more to me such words as these, and let us have understanding. Daughter of Ga am I, and a woman as thou knowest; but one for whom not—any more does Azil spread his wings."

She paused and stood before him, head back-tilted on the round, white pillar of her throat, arms straightened beside her a trifle extended, drawn a trifle back, tense as a tightened cord in all her slender length; staring wide-eyed into his eyes, until abruptly she lifted a hand and struck herself sharply on the breast and turned from him, crossing the court to disappear from sight.

BESIDE the pool Croft remained more than a little disturbed by the feeling that, urged on by the propinquity for which he had thirsted through weeks, he had on this first meeting risked too much. Nor was his mood lightened by the fact that Naia failed to appear at the evening meal, and the questioning expression in Gaya's glance, which she turned upon him from time to time. As a matter of fact, the girl's close presence had gone to his head, and he had literally sought to gain from her some sign—to speak not so much to her physical mind as to her soul. But as he sought his chamber that night, it appeared that, instead of rousing an answering flash from her spirit, he had struck a note which in some way disharmonized.

And because of that he sought her out, safe once again in the undertaking, since should he call her to him in the astral body now, she might well think that she dreamed once more—a dream inspired by his presence in R[illegible]r's house.

He willed himself to her. Long practice had made it easy. With him now, such things occurred in a flash. It was his intent to summon her forth, speak to her such things as he dared not speak yet in the flesh. But once in that yellow-draped room of Robur's dwelling where he had thought to find her stretched on the amber-jeweled copper couch, he paused—paused and stood waiting and watching, because—

Naia knelt, a slender white shape in the dusk of her apartment, before the figure of Azil, beside the mirror pool. And as once before, when she had cried out to this same Angel of Life against the barter of her body to a profligate traitor, for the saving of her nation, so now once more Croft bent his head while she prayed:

"Oh, Azil, who carry life from Zitu to all the daughters of Ga, by his command—thou whose sign I have torn from my girdle and flung at the feet of him who gave it, have pity upon me. For truly am I a daughter of Ga. And though thy sign I hurled against him, even against the symbol of thy wide-spread wings, yet was my action prompted by an agony of spirit, rather than by any wish or intent to show disrespect to thee. And were I wrong, set me aright.

"Spread over me again thy shadow wings—let me once more be altogether daughter of Ga, thy mother—not barren, but a fruitful thing. Or were my impious act too great to be forgotten—if against me thy wings are folded—if woman's birthright I may not hold, nor mirror the life of him, as this pool mirrors thy form within it—if I may not be that Door of Life he called me—have

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pity, Azil; Zitu have pity; have pity Ga, and teach me a new strength."

She rose. Her arms lifted. For a moment she stood so before the carved figure. Then her lips moved. "Jason," they faltered. Her breath caught in a sob. She turned and threw herself upon her couch.

"Beloved!" Croft let the cry of his thrilling soul steal forth. "Beloved you have called me. Beloved, I am here."

Naia of Aphur stiffened in every soft line and curve. She lifted her head as one who listens. She lifted her slender body on her rounded arms. Then slowly, in a wide-eyed wondering fashion, since Croft had not waited for sleep to claim her on this night of nights when he had heard the confession of her love in the sacred shrine of her night-wrapped chamber, she sat up.

And now the borderland between objective and sub-conscious knowledge was narrow—very, very narrow indeed—the consciousness of soul and body was divided by no more than a breath, a hair. Croft felt that it quivered as the woman sat there, rapt of expression.

"Jason," she whispered again at last.

"Beloved—come forth!" Close by the form of Azil, Croft took his station, moved by the sudden impulse that for this girl who prayed to be made once more all woman he was as Azil himself.

The form of Naia swayed. It bent. Slowly it sagged down and lay relaxed upon the couch. And between it and Croft where he waited, there appeared the diaphanous, swaying, scintillating outline of her astral shape.

"Jason!" And now for the third time she cried it gladly with her quivering, flaming lips. "Jason—Azil!" She stretched out yearning hands. "Thou hast come to me again."

"Yes," said Croft, opening his own embrace and drawing her inside its circle. "Yes, I have come—to tell you your prayer is answered—to tell you that of all laws of Zitu, the greatest of all is love—that love in which Ga brought Azil forth before he came to Palos to teach men the way of life. Wherefore for Azil himself I speak when I say, as I have said before, that for me—for me, and for me alone, you guard the shrine of life—that some day, once more I shall place upon thy girdle that sign that in Zitra you flung against my breast."

"Thou hast it?" The contained fire of her substance glowed.

"Yes." Croft smiled. "And some day the fleshly hands of Jason shall pin it fast."

"I was mad, mad!" his companion panted. "Much thinking, the shock of learning thee other than I had thought, had made my heart sick, my mind unsettled—too much I thought of the man, and not enough of the spirit—the real you that is here with me now, as with you the real me is here. Ah, Jason, Jason—one time in Lakkon's palace we stood thus together in the body, and I—I yielded you—my mouth."

"As once more you yield it." Croft lowered his lips to the strange, lambent outline of hers beneath them. He kissed her in a strange kiss such as he had never dreamed of— a thing all inexpressible softness, seeming to hold in its contact a something that tingled like fire. And as though that fire were a strange, cosmic solvent, for an instant as short as a breath, as long as eternity, it was as though their two individualities dissolved and flowed together, blended into one.

Croft tore away his mouth. The thing had been too real. It left a weird, staggering sensation quivering through him, and the form within his strong arms quivered. Its auric fires of white and gold and purple were more radiant than they had ever been. Naia's hands clung to him. Her eyes were uplifted. "Go—go!" she panted. "Send me back to my body. Yet wait not so long to come to me again."

"In the morning I shall see you with Robur," said Croft as he released her. For now he felt assured that she was very, very close to a conscious understanding of the nature of their love—its wonder—its glory—its truth.

CHAPTER XV

THE KING'S MESSENGER

AND that she stood very near indeed to the threshold of understanding, the weeks that followed their third astral meeting showed.

It showed in a changed demeanor of their meeting the next day. Croft waked with the sound of her voice in his ears, and lay for an instant startled in the half world between waking and slumber before he realized that it drifted from the bathing court of the palace.

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Instantly he sprang up, recalling her words of the day before concerning Robur's daily practice at throwing curves with a baseball. He glanced out. Already Naia and her cousin were at work. Croft had overslept, as it seemed, but now his pulses quickened at the picture Naia made.

As he reached the window Robur threw the ball, and the princess ran to retrieve it. All in white she was—a single fluttering garment, its skirt tucked up and caught together for greater freedom of movement, revealing a flashing play of speeding limbs. Bare on the tiles of the tessellated pavement were her pink-arched flying feet, and bare her outstretched reaching arms. And her hair, free, was a cloud of flying gold about her face. An old-time story flashed into Jason's mind. So he thought might Atalanta have appeared, free-limbed, glorious, and unrestrained, as she ran her race. He turned away, tearing his eyes from her youth and grace and beauty, and hastened to dress.

As he came forth five minutes later, she flung the ball with a truly feminine overhead gesture to where her cousin stood. "Zitu, my cousin!" she teased with a flash of milk-white teeth between the twin crimson portals of her mouth. "You throw wider of the mark, and still more wide. To me it seems that you lack that which you speak of in Jason's words as 'control.' Thy ambition to be a pit-cher stands in sorry case."

And then she caught sight of Jason himself and broke off, while across her lovely face there stole a flush as soft as the dawning Sirian light—a flush as beautiful as that on the bosom of rising Aurora, Croft thought. She was panting somewhat, perhaps from her exertions, perhaps from an inward emotion as she turned toward him and held out a tapering hand. "Hai, Jason!" Her red lips changed the object of their speaking, and her blue eyes met his fully. "It is morning—and—I see you again."

"And I thee," said Croft as he touched her fingers—"fairer, more beautiful and altogether lovelier than the dawn itself. Thy voice awaked me and told me I was late for our play with the ball."

But his blood was singing, his pulses pounding. The thrust of his heart was a visible beating at the base of his stalwart throat. For her words had been but a paraphrase of that promise he had spoken to the soul of her he had held the past night in his arms. And more than any others she might have spoken, they told him that at last, as a waking woman, she began to understand.

Yet he gave no further sign, and Naia herself seemed contented with that one brief interchange. "Aye, teach him, instruct him, and thou canst. He is willing, but he accomplishes little with a vast amount of work to himself and my feet and hands."

And Jason laughed with a wonderful exultation coursing through him as he took the ball from Robur, who had approached.

Thereafter for a half-hour he instructed, and Naia retrieved the Aphurian's wild heaves and pitches, until by degrees Robur gained the partial mastery of a simple inward curve; and

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Naia, her face dewed with a fine moisture from her part of the practice, protested against any more that morning, declaring instead for a bath, and moving toward the pool, loosening her garment on the shoulder as she walked.

It fell from her, leaving her in the Tamarizian costume employed by her sex when both men and women bathed—a sort of harness about the back and shoulders—thin, glinting chains of metal supporting gem-incrusted shields above the breast—a girdle at the waist to fasten about her hips, a gold and purple covering, not unlike a pair of trunks. Croft was acquainted with the fashion, but never before had he seen Naia so revealed. He caught his breath with an audible inhalation, and became aware that Robur smiled.

"Go," he suggested as he moved to join Naia in the sun-kissed water. "Tell Bela to ask Gaya for a garment, and join us in the pool."

Croft nodded. He hastened away. He found Gaya's maid, and once with the trunklike article she produced, lost no time in putting it on and returning to the court where Naia and Robur were now contesting in the water, with choking word and laugh. In a clean dive, he cut its surface, shot across the full width of the pool, and came up at Naia's side.

Her hand crept out and lay against him. Almost it seemed to him that she sought the contact. "You are strong, O Jason. You should be at home in the water, even as an Acquor," she said with a quick-drawn breath.

There was a hint of witchery in her smile, however, as Croft knew. The Acquor was a gaudy aquatic creature, colored something like a pheasant, with the head of a goose, red legs, and blue, webbed feet. Consequently he laughed as he replied: "Work in the mountains has reddened my skin, it is true, O little fish of gold and purple and silver—yet have a care, since the Acquor eats little fish that it catches in the water."

"Zitu!" Naia exclaimed, as very much like a silver fish, indeed, she dived.

THEREAFTER Croft forgot all else save her new mood and her presence, until Robur announced that it was growing late, and that he had many things that he must discuss with Croft.

In such fashion, however, did he enter upon the multitudinous energies that marked the following Himyran days. He plunged into them and their endeavors with a song in his heart. Indeed, it was as though the absence which until now he had actually courted had worked its effect on them both—as though that propinquity which followed brought now a sort of reflex attitude into their bearing toward one another, swung them from one extreme to the other more than anything else.

That first day Croft started work on the ovens to produce his coke. With Robur he talked over all his plans. He drove out to the site of his hangars and inspected the rising sheds. He returned to the shops of the carpenter caste, and set in motion the work of assembling the airplane wings. He inspected the bodies, found fault and made corrections, looked into the motor plant, and ordered the captains there to speed up their work. He drove to the glass plant from there, and gave orders for the making of his arc-lamp bodies. He seemed inspired with a ceaseless energy, which finally drove Robur into comment:

"Zitu—Jason, my friend, where is the need for such haste?"

Then, and then only, did he realize with what a restless energy, what a tireless thrill of driving force, he had moved from place to place.

"None, Rob," he said with a quick-caught inhalation; "save that today the fire of life burns high within me, and my spirit seeks action, not rest." He broke off and lifted his own hand to the spot where Naia's fingers had lain that morning on his flesh.

And, as so often, Robur seemed in a measure to catch his thought. "Is she not beautiful as a shaft of Zitu's own light?" he inquired, and looked into Jason's eyes. "Gaya is beautiful, too, and I love her; yet I think thy belief that she is the other half of thy soul is true. For Mouthpiece of Zitu are ye, and wiser than all other men of Palos, and Naia of Aphur, my cousin, is divine."

"Thou hast said it. Her beauty drives me as the whip against the gnuppa's flank. It quickens my endeavor, forces me to fresh effort—" Croft began, and broke off as a captain, followed by a servant from the palace, appeared in the door of the room wherein they stood.

"Hai, Robur!" the captain exclaimed, advancing with uplifted hand. "Here is one who seeks thee, as he says it, by command."

"Speak," said Robur, turning to the

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other—one of a number of Mazzerian runners who as messengers were kept always at hand.

The blue man saluted in formal fashion. "One from Zitra awaits thee at the palace. Even now others seek you from place to place."

"Go. Say that I come." Robur dismissed him and turned to Croft. A pucker of thought lay between his eyes. "This may be from my father. I know not the nature of his message, but—my friend, accompany me in this."

Jason nodded. His heart warmed again, as so often, to this man. No matter what word Jadgor might have sent, Robur, the son of Jadgor, was his friend. David and Jonathan—the comparison flashed in his mind as they left the glass-blowers' shop and entered the motor to drive swiftly back to the palace at once. David and Jonathan! It had been something like that between them from the first. He sensed the subtle way in which, in the present instance, the Aphurian was giving demonstration, that whatever stand Jadgor might have taken toward Croft, his son would follow the dictates of love and honor in his stand.

IN THE huge, red-paved court they left the motor and, passing between the portal guards, made their way swiftly, side by side, to the audience-hall where once Croft had seen Kyphallos of Cathur received by Jadgor, Aphur's king. A man with the circle and cross on his breast—Jadgor's emissary—was waiting there for their coming now. As the two friends appeared, he rose.

"Greeting to Robur, governor of Aphur and son of Jadgor, who sends me to him," he began, producing a ring that Croft himself had often seen on Jadgor's finger and pressed it into Robur's hand.

Robur glanced at it and nodded. "Say on," he replied.

"On Bithur, Mazzer makes war."

"Zitu!" Robur started and turned his eyes to Croft.

Croft nodded. Beyond a narrowing of his eyes, he gave no sign of the quiver of surprise that shook him. "Let us sit down and hear the rest of it," he advised.

Robur waved his father's emissary to a seat and found one of his own. "And now thy story, and quickly," he urged, while Croft found a place by his side.

"As thou knowest who led an army into Bithur when Zollaria made war," the Zitran resumed; "there was promised to Mazzer, for her help of the children of Zitemku to the north—whom Zilla take to himself—certain of the expected spoils. And as thou knowest, in all that was contemplated, both Zollaria and Mazzer failed. Yet was Mazzer promised a free highway down Bithur's principal river to the Central Sea. Mazzer, encouraged thereto as thy father thinks by Zollaria perchance, now presses this demand. Bithur, being not as Aphur and Nodhur and even Milidhur, supplied with the new weapons they used against Helmor's armies, is weak. Already have there been clashes between the blue men, better armed than ever before, and the men of Bithur along the border.

"Towns have been burned—fields laid waste—women carried into the forests, and men and children slain. Wherefore Jadgor commands you this. Send to Bithur the armored moturs, and a thousand men with the new weapon that shoots metal and fire with the death-dealing bolts of metal they discharge. For since all Tamarizia is one nation, it is fitting and just that the weak should cry for aid in their need to the strong, and that the strong should hear. Jadgor, who sits on Hiranur's throne as head of Tamarizia, has spoken. Let Robur of Aphur give ear to his words and obey."

"Aphur hears." Robur inclined his head. "Say to Hiranur that Aphur obeys. The moturs, the men, and the weapons go to Bithur at once. Man of Zitra, you will refresh yourself ere your return."

"Nay." Already the other was on his feet. "This matter gives no rest. I return so soon as Aphur's obedience is assured. Zitu speed the fulfilment of your promise." As Croft and Robur rose he bowed and left the room.

Robur turned toward Croft. "Revenge," he said. "A war of revenge, my friend. Zollaria, cheated of her foul designs, would harass Bithur's borders. Hai!" His eyes flashed. "So be it. We shirk not what Zitu sends. Jason, go with me. Help me to send what is needed forth."

"Yes," Croft nodded, and for the rest of that long day the drive of energy within him found full vent. Runners were despatched to notify the captains of the civic guard, and a sufficient number of the veterans of Croft's riflemen in the Zollarian war. Cases of cartridges were loaded into the motor galleys along the quays. Six of the armored motors Croft had designed and used against Helmor's legions went roaring through the streets

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and snorted their ungainly way aboard the waiting ships. What Aphur had been called upon to furnish, she set about providing without delay.

And yet, though in no way was he glad of this fresh need of armed force on Palos; there was no satisfaction in his soul at the thought of dead men, and women carried captive into the Mazzerian towns. Now and then as he worked, superintending that transshipment of men and munitions, Croft smiled. And his smile was strange as he found himself wondering just how Jadgor would meet this flank attack—this guerrilla warfare hurled against his most poorly prepared state by that beaten nation to the north, which Jadgor seemed inclined to take credit to himself for having defeated in war.

And that night, because there were things he wanted to know, he decided to learn them in the same way he had learned many, many things to his own and Tamarizia's advantage before. He willed himself to Zitra, to the palace and the presence of the man who had boasted to Zitu's Mouthpiece of his strength.

Zitra lay, all crystal and white and silver, under the triple moons. And then he was in a room with Jadgor and Lakkon and another—a stranger, whom he learned from the following conversation was a man of Bithur, Parthys by name.

The latter was speaking as Croft came in.

"By Zitu!" he exclaimed. "These bands are led by men of Zollaria, beyond any question. Some there are who have been killed in the fighting, and—they have stained blue their skins and dyed red their fair hair.

"Beaten in fair fight, she sends her captains to lead these barbarians against us—to outrage our women, and dash out the brains of sucklings and destroy our men. Jadgor, this was planned. Even among the men of Mazzer among us have there been whispers, so that blue men have slain the Bithurians in whose homes they were employed, and information has been transmitted from among us to our foes. This is Zollaria's vengeance she sends another to fulfil. Like a blue swarm of stinging insects, they swarm against us. Ten towns lie in ashes. Medai, our governor, is gathering our people for defense so quickly as may be. Yet, and aid be not sent us quickly, Zitu himself knows what may be endured."

Jadgor's dark face grew darker still at this report. He struck the table by which he sat a characteristic blow with his fist. "By Zitemku, the fiend whose spawn they are, they shall pay double price for what they have undertaken," he declared. "For aid I have sent already to Aphur. By now a swift galley should have arrived at Himyra, bearing my agent to the governor, my son. Once has Jadgor, when of Aphur, saved Tamarizia from Zollaria's designs. Fear not, Parthys of Bithur, that with the same means Helmor was vanquished, we shall punish this blue horde."

"Yet were it not better"—Lakkon put out a hand and touched the corded forearm of his brother-in-law, still tensed as it held his sinewy fingers doubled into an almost hammerlike fist—"were it not wiser, Jadgor, to ask the advice of him to whom much of our success against Zollaria, and the return of Mazhur to the nation, is due?"

"THIS Mouthpiece of Zitu?" Jadgor turned his eyes. "By Zitemku, Lakkon, where are thy wits? Must Zitu, even through his Mouthpiece, teach us our lessons twice? Have we not the weapons that carried death into Helmor's ranks by the thousands of souls? Know we not how to use them? Know we not that a thousand men so armed are the match for five, yes, for ten thousand equipped with sword and shield? And a thousand of such men I have asked from Robur, with a number of the moturs which ground Helmor's guard in the last battle beneath their crushing wheels. Enough! In four suns I myself shall go to Bithra, with our noble Parthys, to confer with Medai. When the Aphurian galleys arrive I myself shall take the field. Thou, as my agent, shall stay here till I return. Small need to question Zitu's Mouthpiece in a matter such as this."

Parthys nodded. "Your words strengthen the heart, O Jadgor," he resumed. "In four suns we shall depart? That is well. As yet it appears that only Bithur is attacked. Were it not wise to send word into Milidhur, lest along her borders these blue men forget the barter of hides and dried meats and cheese, and turn to war?"

"Aye." Jadgor nodded. "He who is warned is best prepared. Lakkon in the morn see to it. Let Milidhur be watchful for the slightest hostile sign along her borders. Then shall we teach this spawn of Zitemku to pluck Zollaria's vengeance

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for her; and should we capture some of these seeming men of Mazzer who have dyed themselves to play a part, I swear they shall wear their false tintings ever."

At least it was clear that Jadgor realized the nature of the trouble along the eastern border. How completely he would be able to meet it was a question which time alone would show. On the face of things, he was acting promptly and in a calmly thought out way. Had there been one single thing in his whole course open to objection, it would have been his overconfidence of the final issue which Croft would have criticised. But as he flitted back to Himyra he was fully aware that Jadgor was one of the few men in all Tamarizia versed in the art of war—was a good general in so far as Palosian methods of warfare went. And it appeared that, with Bithur's man-power organized and augmented by the thousand rifles, the six armored moturs from Himyra, Jadgor, even as he himself had declared, was very apt to make short work of Mazzer's naked horde.

Hence, as much because he wished to so believe as for any other reason, it was with the feeling that the affair along the Bithur borders was no more than a tempest in a teapot that he opened the eyes of his body and turned himself on his couch. Let Jadgor handle it in his own fashion, since he felt fully able, as no doubt he was, with the aid he had asked from Aphur, even now going rapidly into the galleys where Himyra's fire-urns flared along the quays, and the little cars trundled down the merchandise tunnels, bearing cartridges and rifles. As for himself, Croft smiled. He had plenty to do in Himyra, and—Naia of Aphur had gleamed like a blade of silver that morning as she cut her slender way through the waters of the pool. Only he had called her a little silver fish, and she had cried out and dived. He rose and lighted an oil sconce, and found the silver medallion, with its embossed figure of Azil and its circle of blood-red stones. Placing it in his palm, he sat staring at this amulet that had once proclaimed her his.

CHAPTER XVI

BETWEEN HIMYRA AND THE SUN

IN THE weeks that followed, many things transpired. The line of poles stretched its length from the power station to Himyra, and men were stringing wires. Croft made coke, ground it into powder, mixed it with a cohesive substance, and molded it into carbon cores, to serve his growing arcs. Also, he began experimenting in the construction of batteries, both moist and dry cells. He succeeded with the former from the first. And for these experiments he demanded of Robur, and obtained, the use of an unused room in the palace, where he often worked at nights.

Chemistry, as an exact science, was unknown on Palos, but through consultations with the local caste of physicians Croft managed to collect a certain number of crudely refined salts which they commonly used as drugs. The room where Croft delved into the simpler mysteries of nature became an apartment of wonder to Robur, who came to it first himself, and later brought Gaya and Naia.

And on the night of their first coming, Croft explained the laws of chemical affinity as best he could to the three, comparing the force that drew the ions together with love, and caught a comprehending flash from Naia's blue eyes.

Thereafter she came as she willed when he worked, and watched while he struggled with his far from satisfactory equipment, and asked a hundred questions, until he suggested that she assist him, whereupon she accepted with a readiness that filled him with surprise. Night after night thereafter she donned a coarse smock and labored at his side, finding a new world open before her with the wide-eyed interest of a child; beholding for the first time the deliberate manipulation of the hidden forces of nature, beginning at length to understand man's right and power to use them to his advantage, direct them and command, to look upon them not as some supernatural manifestation, but as a wholly natural thing.

Meanwhile in the motur shops, Croft's by now expert force were assembling the first two airplanes. And in the same place, since he could work there as well as anywhere else, and supervise their work at the same time, he and Robur spent a part of each day constructing a resistance coil and a temporary switch on a slab of the marble white stone so much in evidence on Palos, against the day when the new light should be shown to Himyra first.

At the end of two weeks, however, he moved the now finished wings and bodies in which the moturs had been installed

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to the hangars and installed a force of men with them there to complete the work. Meanwhile at night he kept up his search for a satisfactory dry cell, telling Naia that the success of the flying machine depended upon it; so that when at last he succeeded, and she felt the current tingle through her fingers for the first time, she cried out in delight.

And in those two weeks, as Gaya had planned, as Croft had known must happen, constant association and education had its effect. As they played ball in the mornings, and bathed, and worked, and sought for strange, new results such as the woman had never dreamed in all her existence, they drew closer and closer together in their aims, their every interest, their understanding, than they had ever been. In his own way and by his own methods, Croft was rapidly raising the woman, whom as a woman he worshiped, toward his own mental plane. Thus in the end she came to a realization that those things which had once seemed as much a miracle to her as to any of her people, might very well be manifestation of natural law within the grasp of man.

His dry cells perfected, the success of his engine ignition assured—several arcs nearing the finished stage of their construction, Croft had a new thought. He decided that after his demonstration of the airplanes at Himyra, he might wish to exhibit them at Zitra, and altered his plans somewhat as a result, and equipped each plane with a set of buoyant pontoons, thereby converting them to the type of flying fish more nearly than anything else. He explained his reason for this to Naia, with whom he was now talking everything over fully, and she smiled.

"On the water they will run as well as through the air," she said, when he had finished. "Jason—you must teach me to fly as well as everything else."

And as on the first afternoon of his coming to Himyra from the mountains, Jason frowned. "I like not the thought. There is danger in this flying."

"Danger?" Naia of Aphur arched her brows. "Think you I have any fear?"

"No," he hastened to assure her. "It is Jason who for thee would be afraid."

For an instant she colored and then went a trifle pale. "And what of Naia of Aphur, think you, when Jason dares this danger, my friend?"

"It is a matter of knowledge," Croft said quickly, thrilled by her hinted meaning. "I have driven them before."

"On earth?" Naia's pupils widened swiftly, making almost black pools of her eyes.

"Yes, on earth, where they use them also in the battles of their wars."

"Hai!" cried Naia sharply, with a quiver of her finely chiseled nostrils as she caught the picture his words conveyed. "To rise and wheel and fight—to struggle like great birds in the air. This earth of which you speak must be a wonderful place."

"Yes," said Croft, as he went on and told her many things, describing among others the aviator's dress.

"And what will Jason wear on Palos?" she asked.

Croft laughed. "I had not given it any attention. I must consider the matter. Perhaps a garment fashioned out of gnuppa hide."

Naia nodded. Suddenly her scarlet lips were smiling. "In my mind I see as in a painting these leather-clad men of earth. Leave the matter of your apparel to Naia, and you will, O Jason," she replied.

And Croft assented, filled with both pleasure and surprise.

THEN came a night to Aphur very much like that before the first motur was finished—a night when a very few hours would see the first pair of airplanes done. And that night Croft remained at the hangars, examining, tuning, testing and testing again the motur he meant to demonstrate to Robur and the gaping workmen, with the dawn. Over and over he turned on the spark and sent the giant-voiced engine spinning with an ever-steadying hum. Under the flare of oil slushes burning about him, he looked into the face of the captain in charge of the hangar crew and found his bronzed skin pale.

"Thou wilt dare it, Mouthpiece of Zitu?" the fellow said in a tone of awed deference, meeting Croft's glance. "Thou wilt attempt in this device to mount the air? Brave men have there been in Tamarizia, aye and brave women, yet none like to thee before."

"Nonsense!" said Jason, and laughed with a catch in his breath. For indeed he was thrilling with a vast sense of accomplished purpose as the motur roared. "With the sun I shall be a thousand vestrons over your head," he declared, meaning thereby approximately three thousand feet. And he laughed again, more in sheer nervous tension than from

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any humor as the captain instinctively tipped back his head and stared at the hangar roof.

Satisfied at length that everything was ready, he threw himself on a pallet, from which he rose at dawn. To his rousing cry came the captain and his men. The doors of the hangar were opened, and the first airplane on which Sirius had ever shone was trundled out, rolling on wheels affixed to the bottoms of each pontoon.

And even as it appeared, a motur flashed from the blurring shadow of Himyra's red walls and dashed toward it along the road. It was Robur coming to witness his friend's latest venture, driving in a smother of dust and impatience. Leaning against a vane, Croft watched his progress, and so received a surprise. Robur was not alone.

At first Croft noted the fact with wonder, and then with a leaping heart. Naia was with him—Naia of Aphur. He was to make his first attempt to scale the air of Palos before her purple eyes. He caught a deep breath, and his own eyes flashed as the motur approached, and he went toward it, and Robur sprang out.

"Hail, Jason, Tamarizia's first man-bird!" he exclaimed, glancing from Croft to the huge machine. "Zitu, I can scarce believe that so large a thing can rise and take to wing."

"Bird-man, not man-bird, Rob," said Croft, giving Naia a hand to assist her from the motur, and becoming aware that she carried a package across her knees.

"Thy garment," she explained, extending it to him. "Go into the cote where you house your bird and put it on."

"My thanks for it, and your presence," Croft accepted and helped her from the car. "Hai, Rob—don't fool with the engine, will you, while I don my new attire?" He turned away and disappeared through the hangar doors.

And there he opened the bundle with unsteady hands and lifted what it contained. Trousers, or rather breeches, they seemed of leather as soft as the finest earthly ooze grain—a tunic—a helmet—leg cases fashioned to strap on. And Naia of Aphur had designed them, had planned them, directed their making, had brought them to him this morning. Croft's hand actually fumbled the buckles as he put them on. Yet in the end the thing was done, and he stepped forth clothed from toe to head in russet brown, save for the front of the helmet, through which shone his face.

"Zitu!" cried Rob, and Naia's eyes were shining as he advanced toward them followed by the hangar's crew, and mounted into his seat.

Over the fuselage edge he looked down directly into their blue depths. And suddenly they lost their glint of pleasure, grew dark and a trifle strained in the white oval of her face. "Take places!"

The hangar crew ran to the stations Croft had already assigned.

"Ready!" Two of the men laid hold of the propeller and sent it around.

With a roar the engine caught on. A cloud of backdriven dust half veiled the men who steadied the huge plane against the drag of the motur holding it, checking it as it strained and quivered like a hound against the leash.

"Let go!"

The men fell back. The plane quivered, moved slowly in advance. Out across that same desert where once Jason had driven the first motur in a mad, reckless dash to save Naia of Aphur's life, he now shot forward in the first quickening dash of Aphur's first airplane. Forward—faster and faster—faster and faster—then up. Obedient to his shifting of the controls, the huge machine tilted, seemed to rear on its haunches, lifting its nose, its wheels, rising, rising—free of the ground at last—free and rising, higher and higher, up! up!

UP, UP! A spear-point of the rising sun caught it and set it aglisten as it rose. Up, up, its well-tuned motur roaring out the song of a marvel's birth. Up and up against the pink and blue of morning. Up and up, smaller and smaller to them who watched it from beside the hangar. Then, as they watched, it turned. It turned and flew back above them, five hundred feet in air. It began to spiral, ever rising higher above the ground. And suddenly, though Croft did not know it at the time, and Robur, lost in amazement, did not sense it, Naia of Aphur ran swiftly to the motur and, carrying something crushed to her bosom, from there to the doors of the hangar, and disappeared.

Over the fuselage Croft looked down. The hangar was a little shed beneath him. The cluster of watchers were a group of ants. A vast elation filled his breast. Once more his efforts were crowned with complete success. With no more than some minor changes, he felt that his mastery of the Palosian atmos-

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phere was assured. He altered the inclination of his vanes and began sliding swiftly down, gliding gracefully back to a rolling stop at the end.

"My friend!" cried Robur, running up. He caught Jason's hand as Croft climbed out, and stood clinging to it."

And though an hour before Croft would have been well satisfied with such recognition, he became aware now of hunger for something else. Naia—it was her praise, her congratulations, he wished. He turned his head, seeking her presence, and found it, and gasped.

For Naia of Aphur had changed since he left. No more was she a glowing girl in her fluttering garments, waiting to see him essay human flight with bated breath. Gone were the filmy draperies that had swathed her; and instead, she stood before him, habited like himself, in a smaller suit of brown, which clung to her graceful limbs and supple torso like a loosely fitted skin. Gone even were the masses of her golden hair, veiled under a helmet of brown.

But as he met them, her blue eyes were the same. And they were fired with a light of excited anticipation. "Again!" she cried. "Again—and this time I shall go with you, Jason—I would fly!"

"Naia! My cousin!" Robur started forward a pace in instinctive protest.

"Nay." She wheeled upon him, stamping a small foot incased in the soft, brown leather. "Nay, Robur, I shall be the first woman in all Tamarizia to fly." She stretched out slender, appealing arms. "Jason—is there not place between your wings for me?"

"Yes." There was something almost a veiled suggestion of wider meaning in her words, and Croft caught it as he gave her his hand. The thing was madness—but—it thrilled him—excited his admiration afresh as he realized that the whole thing was no matter of the instant, no impulse, but something she had thought out, planned—for which she had caused her costume to be made at the same time as his own. And he had not the heart to deny her, in the flush of his recent success.

"Come," he said instead as Robur fell back, and caught her under the arms, lifting her lightly up, until her foot gained a supporting hold and she climbed to her place in the pit of the fuselage.

And then, settling himself once more in position, Croft cried to his men, and once more the engine roared.

Briefly he glimpsed his companion's face. It was eager, expectant, in the morning light. Her breast rose and fell in a barely quickened rhythm under its covering of brown.

"Let go!"

Once more the plane advanced, jolting, tipping a little, swaying to the slight irregularities of the ground it ran ahead. Croft moved a lever. The obedient monster answered. The desert fell away beneath. Up, up, Jason of earth and Naia of Aphur, daughter of Ga, and child of Palos, swam toward a brightening sky of pink and gold. Up and up. Once more he stole a sidelong glance at his companion's face. It was lifted, tilted a little back—its blue eyes closed.

"Naia!" Croft spoke to her above the motur's roar.

She lifted her lids, met his somewhat anxious regard, and smiled. And from him she let her gaze wander over the whole vast panorama of desert and mountain and the Central Ocean, blue and green and black and gold, with a froth on the nearer waves like a fringe of white to their shadowed flanks as it caught the light, and Himyra—the red city beginning to glow as Sirius shot his shafts against its ruddy walls, and like a dull chain, supporting the red jewel of the city on the breast of Aphur, the yellow Na, outlined as far as the eye could reach by a band of shimmering green.

And suddenly her breast lifted, her lips parted, and she began to sing—to sing as she had once cried to Croft that the birds she envied sang as they rose against the morning—gladly — clearly — freely as a bird itself might sing.

So sang Naia of Aphur, between Himyra and the sun.

After that Croft taught her how to fly. Having once yielded, he could not well again refuse. And Naia had her way with him, as she had meant to do ever since she first was taken with the notion of herself controlling one of the new machines that he had made.

BUT the promise to teach her she exacted that same morning after they had returned to the palace. Robur ran off to tell Gaya concerning the success of the trial flight, and Naia dared Croft to bathe. Afterward he was half inclined to think she adopted the time and place to a gaining of her point. Woman she would not have been had she not realized her beauty and its appeal. But at

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the time he gave the matter no thought.

"You will surely teach me to fly?" she said almost as soon as they floated side by side.

"No," he denied in a somewhat uncertain fashion. "This morning I yielded because of your great desire to be the first woman of Palos to take to the air. In that I was not altogether wise. Again I would not dare."

"Yet and you yielded to my desire in the matter of this morning, your excuse should be the same in yielding to me again, no less. Ah, Jason"—her hand crept out and lay upon his arm—"now know I the feeling of a bird when it rises and sings from pure joy, for the first time in my life, and the knowledge thrills me; I would know it again, because—" She broke off with a little, gasping breath.

"Because of what?" Croft turned his head and looked into her pansy-purple eyes.

"Because," said she very slowly, "it is to me as though I was no longer mortal—as though I had in some way left the body—cast off all the weight of the flesh."

"Naia!" Croft stammered. "Thou knowest?" and paused, strangely shaken at the knowledge her words showed.

"Aye—since the last time you called me to you. Come and I shall show you, Jason." She turned and dived.

Croft followed. Down, down, he followed her gleaming form through the clear water. Down, down, until he swam beside it. And then lost, buried deep in its liquid embrace, screened from all observation by the play of the sun upon its surface, she turned still closer to him, and for the first time since old Zud's blunder had brought misunderstanding she offered him her scarlet mouth.

From that kiss man and woman came up gasping almost as to a new birth. Misunderstanding, all barriers of restraint, seemed to have been washed away in the shimmering pool's soft flood. "Ah, Acquor, Acquor," Naia panted, "thou has caught thy little fish at last."

"Fear not, little fish," said Croft in a voice which quivered, "I shall not eat you, but—this time I shall surely hold you fast."

"And you will teach me to fly?" There was witchery in Naia's words and in her smile; witchery, whimsy, almost a conscious knowledge that now—now—she could not be denied.

"Yes," said Croft in open surrender. "And Zitu pity me if aught befall thee."

"Nay, I will be careful," Naia sobered. "And—and—"

"And what—is there something more, beloved?" Croft questioned softly.

"Nay." She lowered her eyes. "I must go fasten my girdle about me lest we be late for the morning's meal." She swam toward the sunken steps.

And suddenly Croft knew—the thought that had stirred her soul, and it set his own soul glowing. In one swift stroke he overtook her. "Beloved, beloved," he whispered to her, "on the day the new light comes to Himyra I shall once more fasten thy girdle with Azil's seal."

"The new light—" The fires in her blue eyes quickened. "Aye, Jason, I would wear it in the new light," she said as, side by side, they clambered from the pool. "Once in these waters I sought the mouth of Zilla, and in them today I found Azil's, beloved, in the touch of yours."

Half an hour later Croft met Gaya, and she stopped him. "Wise man, and one of great wisdom, are you, Jason, as Robur, my husband, tells me, saying, ac-

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companied by Naia, you have conquered the air." She put out her hand.

Croft took it. He bent toward her. "Hark you, Gaya, my sweet friend," he said, speaking softly. "The air is nothing. I have conquered something else."

"What mean you?" Gaya questioned.

"That Naia of Aphur, on the day the new light comes, will wear my seal," Croft told her.

"Zitu," she exclaimed, smiling, "you have spoken, then, at last. Wise man I have confessed you, yet to me you have seemed most blind in this as most men are with women. Glad though am I for you both. But now she was in my chamber, and radiant as Ga. She declared you would teach her to fly, and easily deceived as I was, I thought it that."

AFTER that two causes hastened Croft's arrangements for the celebration of the coming of the light. One was the renewal of his formal betrothal with Naia, of course. The other was of a wholly different sort.

As for Naia, save for the hours he spent in the shops, he was with her the greater part of the time, either teaching her the control of a plane, which she mastered quickly both on land and water, or in the laboratory, or, in the evening, sometimes speaking with her alone, sometimes with Robur and his wife. And in the laboratory, one evening shortly after the day of their first flight together, Croft spoke to her of love as he had spoken once before but with a different meaning. Taking two salts in solution, he poured them together.

"Behold," said he, as he mixed them and formed a substance compounded of their blending which fell slowly to the bottom of the glass, "behold, beloved, the chemistry of love—how each atom draws the other atom to it, until they blend and are no more, but lose themselves each one within the other to form a definite something which was not before!

"Behold—for even so, beloved, it is with the souls of men and women—each drawing the other to it; each blending with the other, until in the will of Zitu, and they are truly mated, they melt into perfect union, and a perfect spirit is born!" It was one way of portraying the doctrine of twin souls, the "marriage of the lamb," the birth into angelhood, dependent on the union of the two original spiritual halves, and Naia nodded with a widening of her eyes.

"Each draws the other to it," she said, coming close beside him. "Ah, Jason, did I draw you to me really from the earth?"

"Aye, by Zitu," he swore, and slipped an arm about her.

"Thy need of me brought you unto Palos, even as thou hast called my spirit from my flesh."

"Aye," Croft said in a voice gone husky with emotion. It was the first time she had mentioned those astral meetings in a fashion so direct.

She eyed the new-formed substance in the glass before them. And suddenly she smiled. Face, eyes and lips, her whole fair being glowed. "They meet and mingle, melt into one another," she went on softly, and lifted his other arm and drew it about her form to meet the other. "Ah, Jason, thou messenger of Azil to me—that first night you lay in the palace, yet came and bade the presence of my spirit, and held me even so as you are holding me now; it was as though I forgot all else and knew thee only; as though I was not, save as a part of thee truly, save that I felt the strong fire of thy mouth."

And, again, on a night when the sky was cloudless and the triple moons had turned all the Palosian world to a dreamland of silvered plain and sea and mountain, Croft spoke to her of love. That night he drove her to the hangars, and they entered a machine. Up, up they whirled through an air aquiver with moonbeams; up, up to a land of dreams. And there between the heavens and the far-flung landscape they swam in a dream world of their own making, while the plane wheeled in wide spun circles, like some huge, dark bat against the skies.

"Behold Palos!" Croft cried to her above the roar of the whirling propeller, heard as it swept them forward, yet not seen. "Is it not lovely, is it not fair—this one of all the millions of stars on which we live? And yet why is it; for what purpose; why was it brought into existence, even as you and I, beloved, and sent spinning through the void from Zitu's hand, save for love; save that a million million men and women might find a spot whereon their spirits, the real they, should be given substance, in order that they should live and meet, and know one another, and—love. Wherefore is the body of man no more than the servant to give to love expression, since this is Zitu's plan: that no man's spirit is complete without the woman's, that no woman's

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spirit is complete without the man's; so that in his wisdom, each ever seeks the other to make it whole and satisfy its longing. Thus then is love assured, and life inspired."

He shut off the engine and began a long, slanting, coasting down a moonlighted, sloping path.

"Love," said the girl beside him, "love so great that it spans the space between the stars. And did I call you to me, without knowing, yet now it seems to me, beloved, that I should know and find some means to answer, no matter where you were."

In a long sweep Croft brought the plane back to the ground. And then without any verbal reply, he lifted her from her seat and bore her back to the motur in his arms.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE GRIP OF WAR

AS FOR the other matter which speeded his preparations, it had nothing whatever to do with love—was the exact antithesis of it, dealt wholly with human passion, human strife.

With the grace of a stalking panther, Kalamita entered the tent and came toward the captive on the ground

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It was now over five weeks since the relief expedition had sailed to Bithur from Himyra, and no word had come from Zitra since.

Mentally, Croft had allowed at least two weeks for the galleys to reach Bithra, the capital of the northeastern state, and unload their moturs and men. Another week, he figured, should bring them well into contact with the Mazzerian forces, if Jadgor moved as quickly as he felt assured he would. And drunk as he was with love, busy as he was with his own endeavors, Croft forgot not entirely affairs of state.

As a result he chose a night some weeks after he felt sure the Bithurian army and its reenforcements should have reached the Bithurian borders, and willed himself to Jadgor's tent.

A strange sight met his eyes. He swam above what at first appeared to him as an enormous grassy plain; and beyond it was a forest, dark in its own shadows beneath the moonlight, and beyond that again was a flare of fires. Toward these he propelled himself without knowing whither exactly he was going, yet arriving to find them the flaring remains of burning houses, spread out on yet another open space beside a river, a mere village, such as the peasant classes were accustomed to inhabit, rather than one of the larger walled towns.

And around it, through it, their bodies picked out by the moonlight and the leaping of the flames, were hundreds—not of Bithur's soldiers, but of leaping, howling, spear-shaking, blood and lust gloated Mazzerian men. And beyond it as he saw now, overcoming his first surprise, lay one of the armored moturs, ringed with intermingled Bithurian and Mazzerian corpses and tipped upon its side.

Disaster! For the first time Croft suspected a Bithurian route. In a flash he returned to his original purpose and once more demanded that Jadgor's position be revealed.

And now a walled town appeared before him, not so large as Himyra, but decidedly greater than Zitra, to judge from the circuit of its walls inside which countless fire urns flared. And within those walls, as he sped above them, Croft beheld a beaten army's wrack—two of the moturs, parked close inside a gate; weary men showing the marks of conflict, stretched out beside them in a sodden bivouac.

Then into a palace, built of what seemed a brown sandstone, with a huge inner court paved in green, where fire-urns flared and guardsmen stood before a door through which men in armor, with stern, drawn faces passed in and out. Croft followed the progress of the latter and so came at last to the presence of the man he desired.

Jadgor, of Tamarizia—Jadgor, of Aphur—president of a nation, once a haughty king. Jadgor, of Aphur, wounded slightly, with a binding bandage wound about his grizzled head, with his armor dust-stained and smeared with the grime of conflict, Jadgor scowling like some savage creature overborne, driven into a corner, with the sinewy hand of a muscular arm fingering in nervous fashion at his sword.

And about him a cluster of drawn-browed, armored men, one of whom Croft judged to be Medai, governor of Bithur, since his armor was jeweled with the sign of the state, a green medallion halved by a bar of iridescent crystals, to symbolize the mighty river Bith, which crossed it with its flood.

"Mazzer," said Jadgor, "has loosed upon us her whole horde. Armed are they by Zollaria, led by Zollaria's men. By sheer weight of numbers were we overborne—the wings of our army cut so that the center was engulfed. Two of the moturs broke down, and those in charge of them knew not the secret of the one device which causes them to run, because he who constructed them first held the knowledge to himself.

"The men with the rifles within them were cut off when their supply of bullets was gone. Those others so armed, killed so long as their bullets held out, when they also fell back before these blue fiends as well. The fault is not with the weapons, but with the first seeming of the matter. Men of Bithur, we face no barbarian border raiding. This the principal city of your eastern lands shall soon be assailed. Men of Bithur, this is war. For fresh aid I have sent—for more men and weapons. Thrice on as many fields have we met them, and thrice have we been driven back by press of numbers. They swarm like blue vermin, and where one dies two take his place. Yet though crushed, we are not vanquished. Wherefore we fall back on Atla as a strong place for our defense."

"Strong walls has Atla," Medai replied. "And Jadgor speaks strong words from a strong heart. Yet if this be war indeed

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inspired and sent upon us, not Bithur alone, but all Tamarizia may be affected thereby, if Bithur fall. And since he who made these new weapons knows surely best their use, were it not well also to send one asking him as Zitu's Mouthpiece, to give us aid?"

FOR a single moment Jadgor winced, and then he inclined his head. "Aye, Medai of Bithur, so have I done. In the mouth of him who departed for Zitra and Himyra, for speech with Zud the high priest, and Robur, my son, have I placed words to that effect. For, as you have said, this matter affects not one man or another, or even yet one state. The peril lies now to our welfare as a nation. Were Jadgor to avail himself not of all means to combat it Jadgor were wrong, and, by Zitu, I swear that above all other things in life, it is Tamarizia that Jadgor loves."

Croft thrilled to those words. Here spoke the old-time Jadgor, patriot again. Even as the first time he had watched the man and listened, as now, to his words, in those days when he sought to strengthen his nation through the sacrifice of Naia, hoping so to block Zollaria's plans, so now the *generalissimo* of Tamarizia's forces seemed thinking of his country first. Wherefore Croft felt shaken in his soul, so that a responsive emotion toward Robur's father waked within him and glowed. And he vowed that such aid as was asked he would give, both as Mouthpiece of Zitu, and as a man to whom Tamarizia's welfare, both present and future, was identical with his.

Swiftly he made calculation. At the best it would take eight days for the messenger Jadgor had despatched to arrive. He willed himself back to his own apartments in a flash and sat up on his couch. Much might be done in a week he thought, and there was much to be done. Jadgor had failed largely because the drivers of the moturs understood not the nature of the magnetos which Croft had kept secret in their making, and the ammunition for the rifles had given out. Well, for the first part, he had dry cells now to insure ignition, aside from the more complicated device. Moturs must be equipped with them without delay and the arsenal Robur and he had equipped many Zitrans before, set working—much ammunition, many cartridges and grenades turned out.

He rose and called a guard and sent him for Robur at once. And when he came to him, his face somewhat puzzled by this summons from his slumbers, he told him all that he had learned, and how.

And from past experience Robur believed without question. "Zitu!" he cried, springing up and standing before Croft with eyes that were flashing. "They are driven back on Atla, shut up inside her walls, two of the motors destroyed, their bullets well nigh exhausted. They send for fresh aid. Hai! Mouthpiece of Zitu, how do you advise?"

Croft told him. "Start all men working on more bullets and the bombs we throw by hand. Send men to call the assembly together against the time Jadgor's messenger comes, yet state not why, save that Robur commands. Order all captains of decktarons to hold those men we trained in readiness for a possible call to arms. Give these orders merely; say naught as yet of war."

"Aye," Robur nodded, "it shall be done."

"Speed also," Croft went on, "the completion of the other airplanes. In the morning I begin training men to fly them when they are done. Also"—his eyes narrowed with a sudden thought—"Rob—we shall remove the dynamo, and transport it to Atla, after we have shown Himyra this new light."

"Thou wilt do that still—in the face of this?" Robur stammered.

Croft nodded. Before his mind's eye floated Naia of Aphur's face—Naia who was to pin the seal of Azil on her girdle the day the light he had promised to Himyra was born. Come weal or woe, come war or peace, Croft swore naught should interfere with that occasion.

"Aye," he said, "on the seventh sun from this."

YET despite Croft's interdiction on the spreading of the word abroad, Naia and Gaya were told—the latter as Robur's wife, the former as Croft's assistant in his work. For from now on she became fully that. Day after day, from the hour of the morning bath until late at night, she toiled in the laboratory he had equipped in the palace, preparing the chemicals for the dry cells, aiding him with a tight-lipped, yet unfaltering purpose while the cells were packed, taking full charge in the daytime while he was engaged elsewhere on other work.

Clad in a coarse smock, acid stained

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and scorched, her hands soiled by the manipulation of reagents, she yet had never to Jason presented a fairer, braver sight. She worked. She neither complained nor cried out. She gave her service to her country and to him, in the depths of her purple eyes an almost Spartan light. And Gaya helped. Day after day she labored beside her, under her direction, learning in turn from Naia what she had learned from Croft.

"Are you not glad you have taught me to fly?" Naia questioned one night as they worked. "See you not Zitu's hand in this, beloved, since when you are gone to this spawn of Mazzer's undoing I may continue your work?"

"You?" Croft faltered, sickened at the picture of her meaning. "You must not. As I have told you, there is danger."

"Ah, but"—her smile was very gentle—"is there not danger to thee as well? Think not my heart is like a frightened bird, did it speak in place of my mind. Know you not that to me the loss of you blots out the world?"

"No," Croft cried, and swept her into his arms. "'Tis a brave, brave heart, beloved!" He caught and held her fingers. "O brave, brave heart!"

For a moment she lay against him. He felt her shake. Then it was over, and she straightened up again. "In three suns," she said, "your seal shall glow again on my girdle. Tell me, beloved, for I hunger for the knowledge, how may this separation of the spirit from the body, which you have thrice brought about within my knowledge, be by oneself attained?"

"By desire," said Croft. "By a focusing of all the yearning of the soul on that one thing—without doubt, without fear—by centering the mind on its attaining and on the object whereat in that state you wish to arrive; for indeed, beloved, it is the desire of the spirit in life that accomplishes all things."

"Desire," she repeated softly, "desire. Aye, now I see. One must forget all, save only it, alone to attain it. It must be so great that nothing else save only it remains—as great as the love you have wakened in me—as your desire for me. Ah, beloved, when first Gaya told me of your seeking me from earth, I thought it madness, though even then the thought itself set me aflame. And then"—she threw out her arms and stood before him glorious in her soul's surrender—"then you come to me, in what at first I called—a dream."

"Naia!" Croft stammered, lost in the glory of her. "Naia, what have you in your mind?"

She came closer. "Am I not your mate, who am about to lose you? Yet were this power mine, perchance I, too, might visit you—in dreams."

And now Croft saw her meaning, and like her quivered as once more he held her in his arms.

Then came to Himyra light! Croft smiled in singular fashion on the day it came. Aphur's red city was in carnival attire. Its pavements swarmed with life. Open refreshment booths did a thriving business, jugglers plied their skill on woven mats stretched out in open squares. Jostling crowds swarmed about them, filling the air with jest and good-natured cries. The whole place hummed with a myriad life.

And yet to Jason the whole scene was unreal—a mask, a carnival domino spread as it was above a grinning skull. To him driving in his motor with Naia in purple and gold, above which her snowy left shoulder and throat made a band of ivory, the whole vast assemblage seemed no more than the shifting fantasmagoria of a dream—a gorgeous play of color through the mind of a sleeper not as yet awake. For Himyra made merry in her ignorance of the catastrophe striking against the national borders to the east. Jadgor's messenger had not as yet arrived.

And though Himyra dreamed a dream of splendor, in which none had a thought of care, though the crowds moved in indolent leisure through street and public square, though copper-bodied motors roared and panted over pavements laid in bitumen as smooth in their surface as a floor; though plumed gnuppas pranced with a clatter of slender feet, and bright-eyed, softly shrouded and perfumed women rode within them to the games of the afternoon—the beginning of the celebration of what all thought a new era in the life of Tamarizia and Aphur, still beneath the surface seeming, because of Croft's knowledge, and the words he had spoken to Robur, and Robur's orders, the inner soul of Himyra and all Aphur prepared on this day for war.

In a way the aspect of the city reminded Jason of the condition of the woman at his side in those past days when the soul of her had been his as always, and only the objective mind had failed as yet to wake.

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Today she had come to the game with him alone at his own request. Outside the vast stadium where formerly all public games had been held—a huge thing of red stone, that always reminded Croft of the Colosseum of Rome—he helped her down. Through bowing crowds they gained the entrance giving on what had once been the royal box, now reserved for the governor of Aphur's suite. He led her in through a gilded and frescoed passage, and conducted her to where a scarlet canopy was spread above a tier of seats. She sank down, inclining her head in salutation to a hundred greetings from neighboring boxes, until the purple plume, rising from the cincture in her golden hair, was set a-nodding above her lovely face.

ROBUR came with Gaya a few moments later. The vast assemblage rose and the games began. First was a chariot race, entered by six chariots drawn each by a team of four plumed gnuppas, driven at top speed. Marthos, a young noble, won handily, amid acclaim from the thousands ranged about the immense amphitheater, and was awarded a metal garland, standing flushed with triumph before Robur's box.

Followed various athletic contests, javelin throwing, foot racing, shooting with bows and arrows at a herd of wild taburs driven into the arena from pens beneath the tiers of seats, wrestling matches and other sports, in which both men and women took part. In a way, as he sat at Naia's side, the scene reminded Croft of a reproduction of a public ceremonial of ancient Greece. For as in Greece and in Tamarizia, for generations untold, the contestants threw off all their clothing as they came to their stations and worked frankly nude until they had ended their exhibition of skill or strength, when once more their garments were donned.

The minor events ended, there came a pause. Then from the far end of the arena suddenly there dashed a chariot drawn by four pure-white gnuppas, orange plumed. Straight for Robur's box they plunged and came to a rearing halt as Marthos, to whom had been awarded this further honor, drew them to a stand.

Croft rose. He descended from the box and entered the car. Clad in brown he was, in the suit Naia had designed and had made for him as once more the gnuppas traversed the arena's length and stopped near to where the men from the hangars had trundled the great plane into sight. In a leap he was aboard. The attendants ran to their places. Two men turned the engine over. It caught!

Above the whispers of the multitude its roar rang out. The great plane trembled. Its attendants released it. It trundled forward over the hard packed floor of yellow sand. Straight as a die it surged toward Robur's box until suddenly Croft changed his vanes. And then it rose. It shot up at what looked like a forty-five degree slant. Up and up and up, until it swam above the vast concourse of back-tilted faces. Like the hum of a giant beetle, the sound of its whirring engine came down from a cloudless sky to a myriad ears. Once, twice, Croft made the circuit of the arena, and then began to settle, finishing with a graceful volplane, which left him within a few feet of his start.

"Hai! Hai! Hail to the Mouthpiece of Zitu! Hail to Jason, teacher of all Tamarizia! Hail to him whose mind Zitu has enlightened above all others!" the cry of the multitude rang out. Croft once more in Marthos's chariot pushed back his leather helmet and bowed. Bowing to right and left, acclaimed as a conqueror might have been, he rode back toward Robur's box, and left the chariot and ascended to his seat, and looked into Naia's face, finding it somewhat white, but smiling, and bowing again before the tempest of acclamation began to subside.

Then came the game of ball, on a diamond arena attendants were beginning already to mark out, between the men from the foundries and the team from the airplane shop. Robur himself rose and, taking a ball from an ornate box extended to him by a guardsman, cast it out. Then, as it was passed snappily to the pitcher of the foundry's team which had won the inning and elected to send the airplane aggregation to bat: "Play ball!" he cried.

And suddenly as the first batter fanned and flung his bat away and walked to the bench, very much like any disgruntled batsman of earth, Croft smiled. It was unbelievable, of course. It was a fantasmagoria of the brain. The thing couldn't be, and yet—there was the pitcher of the founders, in a short-skirted tunic, below which his lean thighs showed above his leg-cases of leather,

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cradling the ball, and cuddling it in his palm. And there was the catcher, squatted down back of the plate in breast-plate and mask, twiddling the signaling fingers of a huge labor-browned hand, and—whir—snap! There was the ball thudding against his mitt.

"Strike on-n-n-e!" That was the umpire's voice.

Cr-a-a-a-a-a-c-k! That was the sound of a ball met fairly and lined swiftly out. And there it went, a clean drive between first and second base, into the right outfield.

"Run, run—go on—go on!" That was Robur yelling in ungovernorlike excitement.

"Run—go on—run—oh, run—run!" That was the voice of Naia—of the woman by his side.

Croft turned to her and found her leaning forward, straining her slender length from the hips, lips parted, her eager blue eyes wide.

"Hold it!" That was the airplane's captain coaching the runner.

Thud! The right outfield had slammed the ball into the second baseman's glove.

Croft smiled again. It couldn't be a baseball game on Palos, but—it was.

And as it went on the assembled multitude went wild. They cheered, they jeered, they urged and encouraged, and cat-called and howled. They stamped on the tiers of seats with leather and bare and metal-shod feet. They waved hands and arms. State assemblymen already gathered by Robur's orders, and guests of the occasion forgot dignity and joined in the rising roars that greeted the different plays. And Naia of Aphur was beating against Croft's thigh and yelling—yes, yelling, as the founder's first baseman romped home on a far-reaching drive. "Come on—come on," she was urging the runner. "Come on—atta boy—come home!"

Croft prisoned her beating little fist and held it. The runner scored. She looked into Jason's face and smiled. Croft thrilled. She was all woman—all glorious, lovely woman. He knew it, had seen it proved in the last week when she worked stern-lipped for the good of her nation. But today in this new-found pastime she had forgotten for the moment and become a child.

The game ended for the Founders, three to one, bringing with its termination an intermission, since not until dusk would the lights be turned on.

BLUE men of Mazzer with torches began moving about the vast circuit of the arena, lighting hundreds of oil flares. Blue girls with skins of tabur hide on their naked backs and shoulders, and metal cups in their hands, began threading the tiers of seats selling a mild, light wine. Venders of fruits and conserves for the women, and baked meats and wheaten cakes plied an active trade. In the rear of Robur's box was spread a table, and a meal was served. And before its beginning Magur, high priest of Aphur, arrived. To him Croft and Naia rose side by side and bowed. And suddenly Naia was once more all woman, as she looked into her companion's face and flushed from throat to eyes. Magur's coming meant she was to pledge herself to Croft before all the assembled men and women of Aphur, once the new light came on.

And in such fashion was it done. Two heralds with silver trumpets appeared in scarlet livery, the color of Robur's house. From the front of Robur's box they blew a blast.

And on that signal the arena attendants began running to and fro extinguishing all lights. Over the arena night came down as one by one the oil flares died.

Croft gave a final glance to the woman at his side—to her face, her form, to her dress of purple and gold. He had asked her to put it on. It was the garment she had worn on the first formal occasion in which he had ever seen her take part. And its colors were the same as the auric colors of that astral form of hers which he had seen and found divine. Taking her hand he led her quite to the front of the box. There on either side had been placed one of Tamarizia's first two arcs. And in the back of the box was the controlling switch. And miles away in the mountains men were waiting for the signal of a flare on Himyra's walls to release the power. Already one had gone to see that the flare was lit. And a captain was without to carry word when it shone forth.

Now suddenly he appeared.

Croft closed the switch.

A click—a hiss—the crackling ignition of incandescent carbon—a rising glow in the darkness — then — light — clear, radiant light!

Light that flared up and wavered and steadied and shone on Naia of Aphur, sheathed in purple and gold.

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A babble of sound, a cheer of acclaim. The trumpets of the heralds rang out.

Jason stepped forward and took his place close by Naia's side.

Magur, the high priest, arose, robed in his vestments of azure, accompanied by two temple boys. Each bore a silver goblet on a tray of the same metal that sparkled under the light.

Magur lifted a silver stave crowned with the cross ansata. "Who cries to Magur?" his voice rang out.

"A maid who would pledge herself and her life to the man of her choosing, O Prince of Zitu," Robur replied.

"The man is present?" Magur went on in ritualistic form.

"Aye, he stands beside her," Robur declared.

"Who sponsors this woman?" Magur inquired.

"I, Robur of Aphur, her cousin—child of the sister of her who gave her life."

"Come then in the name of Zitu," Magur said, and advanced to face the arena, back of Naia and Croft.

"Naia of Aphur—thou woman, and being woman, sister of Ga, and hence priestess of that shrine of life which is eternal, the guardian of the fire of life which is eternal—is it thine intent to pledge thyself to this man, who stands now at thy side?"

"Aye," said Naia of Aphur clearly, and looked not at Magur as she answered, but into Jason's eyes.

"And thou, Jason, known as the Mouthpiece of Zitu, whom Zitu has inspired with his wisdom, even as no other man, do thou accept this pledge, and with it the woman herself, to make her in the fulness of time thy bride, to cherish her and cause her to live as a glory to the name of woman, to whom all men may justly give respect?"

"Aye, so I pledge, by Zitu, and Azil, giver of life," said Jason, gazing on the woman as he spoke the words.

"Then take this, maid of Aphur." Magur drew from his robe a looped silver cross and placed it in her hands. "Hold it and guard it, look upon it as a symbol of that life eternal that you shall be kept eternal, and which, taken from the hands of Azil the angel, shall be transmuted within thee into the life of men."

Turning, he took the two goblets from their bearers and poured wine from one to the other and back. One he extended to Naia and one to Croft.

"Drink," he said. "Let these symbolize thy two bodies, the life of which shall be united from this time in purpose. Drink and may Zitu bless thee in that union which comes into existence by his intent."

Jason raised his goblet. "I drink of thee deeply," he spoke to the lovely chalice of mortal life standing there.

Naia set her goblet to her lips. "And I of thee."

Then, and then only, Croft took that medallion of silver ringed with red stones, which Zitra had burned against his breast. And lifting the golden girdle which cinctured Naia's body above the hips he pinned it once more upon it, so that it flashed like a scarlet eye, beneath the newborn light.

Magur lifted his stave. "Azil's seal has he set upon her. Let it speak to all men's sight."

"Hail! Hail! Mouthpiece of Zitu. Hail! Hail! Hail! Naia, maid of Aphur!" From the vast arena a roar of acknowledgment and approbation tore its way upward in the night.

So as it seemed ended Himyra's greatest holiday; so for Croft and Naia began a new phase of life. Yet though she had never seemed nearer, dearer to him, the Mouthpiece of Zitu was vaguely disturbed as they rode back to the palace through the still pleasure-making crowds. Everything seemed very peaceful, very auspicious. But he could not rid his mind of the picture which had troubled him for a week—the picture of a burning village—of blue men leaping in savage exultation of a beaten army's rout.

Hence it was with no pleasure that an hour after their return from the arena, while yet the city flared and rang with the carnival life of the people, a palace guard brought word to him from Robur, asking his presence at once.

Nor when he had followed to the audience chamber of the palace was he surprised to meet a man with drawn face, and eyes a trifle haggard—a man wearing Bithur's green and silver circle, who rose now and saluted him with flat palm forward, and burst into hurried, excited speech.

"Mouthpiece of Zitu, Bithur is sore assailed—her armies beaten, the aid Aphur sent her largely destroyed; wherefore in the name of Bithur and of Tamarizia, Jadgor, president of the nation, now at Atla, sends me to you and to Robur of Aphur, his son, to speak what is in his heart."

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN OF THE HOUR

JASON went to Bithur. Naia remained behind. In the week before the celebration of their former betrothal they had so planned. Now, with the red and silver seal of Azil once more glowing in her girdle, Naia did not object. She was a woman. Croft knew she suffered. It was in her eyes, the touch of her hand. But—as he had seen her prove once before—she was a Tamarizian first.

In the night Jadgor's messenger arrived, the assembly of Aphur was called together. To it the Bithurian explained. Faces darkened and eyes flashed as the startled statesmen learned that once more the integrity of the nation was threatened. But, as a man, in firm determination they empowered Robur and Croft to respond to Jadgor's plea, and accepted the challenge to war.

At daylight, with the airplane he had flown from the first and a supply of grenades and fuel, together with the additional armored motors aboard a swift galley, Jason left for Bithur and the battle-front, taking Jadgor's messenger along. With him also he took a supply of dry cells to insure the better performance of the motors already on the ground.

To Naia and Robur and the trained captains he left all the rest—the assembling of troops, the lading of galleys with all sorts of supplies, the forwarding of other completed airplanes with the men he started to train in their use, whose training Naia of Aphur declared she would complete.

Only at the last did he hold her in his arms and lower his lips to the low burning flame of her mouth. For Naia of Aphur's lips were pale as they lifted to his farewell caress, and her slender body quivered inside his arms and her purple eyes were dark with her soul's distress.

"Yes," she said, clinging to him briefly, "you will come to me again. Swear it to me by Azil, whose sign you have placed upon me—swear!"

"Yes, by Zitu and Azil, I will return to you, woman of all women," Croft declared, as he held her and once more pressed her lips.

Then gripping the hands of Gaya and Robur, he left the palace, and Naia herself drove him down to the quays.

Seven days later he entered Bithra, the capital of Bithur, and left it inside an hour, heading east along the Bith between banks where a tropic vegetation came down to the water's edge, and the mighy flood of waters swept in a turgid current between banks of trees.

Morning brought him close to Atla, as the pilot taken on at Bithra declared. Also it brought attack of a sort. From the banks as they advanced the galley was suddenly greeted by a flight of slithering shafts. Most of them, thanks to the range, fell into the water, but one or two reached the deck. Croft lined a company of riflemen he had hastily mobilized and brought with him on either side of the galley replied with a crashing volley as the galley advanced. So after that, meeting flights of arrows with bullets, he progressed, reaching a bend from which the gates in the city wall spanned the river's flood and flinging the flag of Aphur into view before the sentries on the walls.

The gates swung open. The galley ran through. The gates were closed again. The galley tied to a quay below the brown palace Croft had visited in his astral presence; he marched off with his men. A procession was debouching from the palace gate. It came toward him quickly. He recognized Jadgor and Medai in the van. He halted his company and waited. The others came on. Five paces before him they halted.

"Hai! Mouthpiece of Zitu," Jadgor spoke in greeting. "Thy coming is welcome. What word from Aphur and my son?"

"Aphur sends men and weapons to Bithur," Jason responded. "As for Robur, son of Jadgor, he remains in Himyra to speed the departure for Bithur of all that may be required."

"It is well," said Jadgor. "Return with us to the palace where all things may be explained. Medai of Bithur greets you in Bithur's name."

Medai bowed deeply. The guards behind him and Jadgor turned. Followed by Croft's company they retraced their steps until the palace was gained.

AND there in the room, Croft, Medai and Jadgor sat down. The latter eyed his former adviser and friend. "You are looking wondrous well," he said.

"Yes," Croft nodded. "In all things have my efforts by success been crowned."

"In all things?" Jadgor gave him a piercing glance.

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"Yes," Croft again inclined his head. "Thanks largely to Robur, Jadgor's son. But more of that later, Jadgor. Inform me how matters stand."

Jadgor shrugged. "It would appear to go not so well with the things in my hands as with your plans. From the first was the extent of this matter with Mazzer misjudged; and in addition there is a fault in these motors of yours, when not controlled by the builder's mind. Wherefore they failed when most needed at times, and were by sheer force of numbers overborne. As a result the blue flood of Mazzer laps even now against Atla's walls on all sides."

"Yet breaks against them," said Jason.

"Aye as yet," Jadgor replied.

"And shall break utterly," Croft went on. "Of this defect in the motors already I had learned, in the same way in which I have learned other things in the past, as Jadgor knows. Wherefore his messenger came not to Himyra as a surprise, and for seven suns before his coming, Robur, Jadgor's son and I prepared." He broke off and watched the Aphurian closely.

But Jadgor merely nodded as he responded: "Say on."

"Among those things which have been completed since my return to Himyra," Croft resumed, "is one which flies in the air. Riding upon it a man may cast down such bombs as were used at the taking of Niera in the Zollarian war."

And now Jadgor started and narrowed his eyes, and Medai half rising from his seat exclaimed: "Zitu! Is this the truth?"

"Yes," said Croft. "One came with me aboard the galley. Between decks are the bombs. To-day shall it be set up and to-morrow shall these blue men meet with a surprise. Also have I brought devices to make the performance of the motors more assured. From the ground and from the air shall we smite the Mazzerians at once."

"Ha!" Media roared. "Jadgor—to fly above them and rain death on their heads. Never was such a thing heard of. You believe?"

"Aye." Jadgor of Tamarizia rose. "Zitu's Mouthpiece is a man who speaks not in idle fashion, O Medai. He speaks

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true words. One does well to give credence to his speaking." His hand snapped back and drew his short sword from its scabbard. He presented it hilt forward. "Man whom Zitu has sent to Tamarizia's strengthening, to thee I yield."

"No." Croft waved the sword aside. He looked into Jadgor's face and found it working. "Mouthpiece of Zitu have I been called, in that at times I have been given the power to direct or to advise. In Jadgor's heart and mine must Tamarizia find first place always. Let Jadgor wear the sword."

And suddenly Jadgor's lips set together. He sent the blade back into the sheath with a rasping clash. "You and I together for Tamarizia then," he said with abrupt decision, and thrust out his palm. "Accept Jadgor's hand at least."

The two men gripped and the Aphurian resumed: "Speak, Mouthpiece of Zitu, what do you advise?"

"What men have you at your disposal?"

Jadgor and Medai explained, and Croft decided upon a tour of the walls. The trio set forth. And as they went Jadgor explained further that three times within the past ten days had the Mazzerians attacked them.

Indeed, Croft gained evidence of that when the top of the wall was reached. It came to him first as an almost insufferable stench. Jadgor noted the twitching of his nostrils and burst into a savage exultation.

"Aye, by Zitu! they stink to the skies, these dead litter of an unclean birth. The trenches about Atla's defenses are filled with their corpses. They lie in heaps. They carpet the ground with a blue carpet, even more foul in death than in their life. By the thousands have we slain them, yet by the tens of thousands have their following spawn arrived. Their souls have we hurled to Zitemku and their bodies to the ditch." He swept his arm toward the outer parapet in a wide arc. "Behold!"

CROFT looked out of an embrasure and down. An arrow rattled against the stones beside him, and he drew back. But the one glance had been enough. This was grim reality he faced. In heaps and rows the rotting bodies of uncounted dead lay jumbled in dissolution beyond Atla's walls. He began to think it would be no mean undertaking to defeat the men of an army who fought like that.

"Back!" he said. "Back to my galley, Jadgor! Let us put together the flying device I have brought. Tomorrow I swear we shall give them new death from the skies."

And for the rest of that day Croft sweated and worked, assembling the airplane on Atla's broadest street, which, like Himyra's, faced the river—a splendid concourse, above a terrace, offering him a spot for starting, two hundred feet in width. What of the armored motors remained he had also driven up, and under their metal bodies he installed his batteries, wiring them to the ignition system—explaining to their drivers, how, should the former supply of power be thrown out of service, this auxiliary source might be employed.

Toward evening, however, he altered his plans. To his mind it appeared that the more unseen the destruction which came upon them, the greater on superstitious minds the effect might be. And as he knew even from his association with the Mazzerian serving-caste in the nation he had literally adopted, the Mazzerians were superstitious to a degree.

About twilight he loaded the plane with a good supply of bombs. Ascending from the broad thoroughfare, and returning to it, outlined as it would be by the fireurns, which, as at Himyra, marked the banks of the Bith along the quays, would be no more than child's play. As a result, he decided to make his first bombing expedition beyond the walls so soon as night came down, carry what consternation he could to the Mazzerian forces. This decision he definitely reached after a conference with Jadgor, who announced that for a great distance before the walls the Mazzerian camps were nightly marked by the flares of many fires.

Jadgor, Medai, the major captains of their armies, and many of the citizens of Atla stood to witness Croft's start. Wearing his flying-suit which he had brought for the purpose, Jason climbed aboard. Then at his instruction two frightened-looking soldiers seized the blades of the propeller and turned the engine round. They let go and scampered well out of the way as it roared. The plane quivered, moved. It darted forward along the perfect pavement, tilted and took the air. In a moment it soared high above the walls. Croft shouted once and then forgot all else in the sight beneath his eyes.

As far as he could see before him, and to either side, the night was dotted with

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fires. In a wide semicircle they blinked and winked and flared. They outlined the main position of the Mazzerian army. His heart leaped into his breast, as a rising stench told him he was passing those rotting bodies stretched out among a mass of broken weapons at the foot of Atla's walls.

Then the walls were passed, and with the breath of a clean night in his nostrils, the roar of the engine in his ears, he swept toward the line of fires.

Far, far out he swung. It was his intention to circuit the back areas of the Mazzerian line—to come upon them not from in front, but from the rear—to make his coming appear that of some huge, undreamed monster of superstitious seeming, to traverse their main body from one end to the other, dropping bombs which, under the conditions, he felt could hardly fail of a telling effect.

Far, far out he swam on the new wings he had built for himself—and for Naia. Naia? He smiled. In Himyra she was perhaps flying by day even as he was flying now—flying as he had taught her to fly in body and soul; teaching others to fly for the strength of her nation, as he was flying for her nation and his, to make it strong and secure. For a moment the thought gripped him, and he flew on in a sort of waking dream, until the flare of a hundred leaping fires directly beneath him brought him back to the matter in hand. He passed the first line of the Mazzerian bivouac and darted above a wood and came above a great savanna—a tree-dotted plain, where the camp-fires were flashing again.

Then, and then only, for the first time he reached down and took up a bomb, and sailing high above that plain where the camp-fires looked like a myriad of fireflies far beneath him, he let it fall.

A flash, a ruddy, great mushroom of golden, raying light—a splash of rending destruction in the night. The explosion came up to him long after he saw it, on the lagging vibrations of sound. Again and again he hurled a second and third as he swam from left to right.

Faint, far away, oddly detached, he thought he heard a distant shouting, though it was hard to be sure above the motor's roar. But the light of other fires showed him the silhouette of many figures running, of arms uplifted, as though those who swarmed like a hill of angry ants driven into panic were pointing into the air. Where that cluster of pointing forms seemed thickest he soared on swift, sure wings and let go another bomb. It fell beyond his vision. It burst. The blur of bodies into which it descended was no more.

AND now a strange mood seized Croft in its grip. It was unlike anything he had ever known. It was in reality a sort of air intoxication one may suppose. But suddenly it was as though he were a superman indeed, above all things mundane, so far above the puny mortals who crawled on the ground beneath him, who writhed under the force of his bombs, that he moved in a world detached from them, or any one, or anything save himself.

It was as though he rode on destiny's wings rather than upborne by those of the roaring airplane. He tilted his vanes from no sane purpose, with nothing to gain. Up, up he shot; up, up, until he could see the whole night-wrapped region about him, the forest, the fire-studded camp of Mazzer's army—Atla, a ruddy glow behind her walls, where shortly he must return.

But not yet—not yet. For a time it was enough to chase this new found exultation, to swim here in the void between earth and heaven, alone with the thing he had made, on which he rode; alone with it, with his spirit, and his thoughts of Naia of Aphur, of the time when these blue spawn, driven back to their lairs in the hinterland of Palos, he should return to claim her. It was enough to ride thus the winds of eternity, as it were, sweeping on and on in the wheel of a mighty circle beneath the stars.

A sputter, a cough from the motor. Croft came back from his dreams to the present in a flash. The engine was missing. Apprehension touched him with a breath-arresting recognition of the fact. And hardly had he taken it into account when the motor missed again. And having coughed for the second time, it died.

He was falling—falling! The bombs! Oddly enough he thought of them rather than of being dashed to death. He reached down and found the remaining four he had brought. He hurled them over the side of the fuselage, tossing them wide. Then he began a frantic effort to once more start the engine—in vain.

Below him four ruddy flashes told him the bombs had struck. In a rushing whirlwind the air of night was driving

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past the plane. Doomed as it seemed, still the will to live, to struggle, to overcome danger and death itself remained within him. He began an effort to straighten out the dead plane's course, to catch and use to his own advantage that wind that was whistling past him now. To catch it, to ride once more upon it, if only as a kite may sink back to the earth, and so alight, little damaged rather than broken, splintered by a giddy fall.

So in the end he did straighten out at last and slid swiftly, where before he had eddied and whirled.

"Zitu!" he breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. "God!" For an instant the face of Naia swam before his mental vision, so clear, so bright, so seemingly herself, that it was almost as though he beheld her in the flesh.

Then—the fire-dotted plain was very close. And the airplane was shooting down toward it, even though no longer falling, and there was little chance to choose a course. With a crash the pontoons beneath it struck through the top of a tree, and the whole machine swerved. In mid air it staggered, checked, lunged ahead again like a restive living creature, tipped, slid off sidewise, and crashed down on a crumpling wing.

Unable to maintain himself in his shaken condition, Croft gave vent to an inarticulate cry of anguish. The entire bulk of Palos seemed to rise and hit him, as catapulted from the fuselage by the ruinous landing, he struck and lay in a dark and senseless huddle on the ground.

CHAPTER XIX

A TAWNY VAMPIRE

HOURS afterward, as it seemed, Croft opened his eyes, and blinked at a flare of light and closed his lids again, while he sought to collect his shaken senses.

He remembered by degrees.

The plane had fallen. There was nothing after that. But he had fallen upon a night-wrapped plain, studded with the fires of a camp. Now, instead of stars above him, there was what looked like the bellied top of a tent. Slowly he spread the fringes of his lashes and sought to verify the impression he had gained.

He was correct. He lay in a tent, seemingly of skins joined to form the sloping top and walls. The interior was lighted dimly by a couple of flaring torches. But the light was sufficient to show Croft piles of military gear, rugs of native skin, on one of the latter of which he seemed to be lying, and some crude stools scattered about.

He lay with head half turned as he had been thrown down, and now he became aware of other life in the tent as his senses more fully returned. There was a sound of voices. He opened his eyes widely and stared about. And inwardly at least he gasped.

This was the headquarters of the army he had sought to bomb, past any doubt. Blue men—a dozen, a score were clustered about a huge chair to one side, in which another blue man sat. And yet—in the latter Croft detected something familiar in a flash, and immediately after he understood. He had heard it alleged that certain Zollarian captains had stained their bodies and shaved their heads and dyed the remaining scalp lock of their light hair to match the Mazzerian red.

And—and—this was Bandhor of Zollaria—brother of Kalamita—that tawny female magnet with which the northern nation had sought to bind the profligate Prince of Cathur to her cause. This was Bandhor, his massive body stained blue in its every ungainly line, seated upon this chair before which the other blue men stood. And inspecting the latter more closely, marking their features well in the murky light, Croft decided that most of them were men of Zollaria tinted and shaved and dyed like Bandhor himself.

Here then was proof of Zollaria's hand in the Mazzerian invasion, proof that Croft lay in the spot which was the brain center of the Mazzerian army in the field. Croft's head was splitting, but he sought to focus his attention on what was being said.

"Sayest thou that this man fell out of the skies?" Bandhor roared, turning his eyes toward where Croft lay on the farther side of the tent.

"Aye," said one of the captains, whom Jason felt positive was a Zollarian for all his naked blue length. "Aye, Bandhor, he fell from a device like to a pair of wings. Before that had strange weapons fallen upon my men from the skies in a rain of death. Then suddenly came this man."

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"Tamarizian devil," Bandhor swore with savage force. "This newest method of their fighting would seem to be like their last, when they struck Zollaria's army with a blast of fire. Go see if still he breathes."

Two of the men turned and approached Croft. They bent above him. He stared straight into their faces.

"Aye, Bandhor of Zollaria," reported one. "He has opened his eyes."

"Bring him here."

Croft rose. Without waiting the touch of a captor's hand he staggered up and faced Bandhor's chair. "Stand back," he hissed to men beside him. "I would walk alone." He took a step forward, swaying; whereupon the others seized him and hurried him to Bandhor's place.

"Spawn of Tamarizia," Bandhor began, "what is thy name?"

"Thou hast said it, Bandhor," Croft retorted, determined to give no information.

"Came you from Atla?" Bandhor roared.

"Yes."

"How many men inside her walls can Jadgor and Medai claim?"

"Enough," said Croft. "Enough blue-dyed men of Zollaria to pile other thousands of your naked dupes before them. There are not men enough in all Mazzer to scale at Zollaria's command Atla of Bithur's walls."

"Hai! By Bel of Zollaria thy fall has not broken thy tongue at least!" Bandhor exclaimed. "But thy man-made wings are broken, and thy insolent spirit may be broken also. Hai—bring a brazier and a spear head. Since this Tamarizian fights with fire we shall give him a taste of it himself, and learn perchance what within Atla transpires."

"Hold!" Suddenly the wall of the tent behind Bandhor's chair swept back, revealing a small private tent beyond it, and a tawny woman appeared.

White she was in the murky light as a ray of moonlight in the dusk—white, and splendidly formed in every supple line of sensuous body and limb. Jeweled cups covered her breasts, and a scarf of shimmering tissue was twisted about her sinuous loins and fell half down her thighs. With the grace of a stalking panther she advanced, accompanied by another blue-stained Zollarian captain, and took her stand beside her brother. In the flare of the torches she gleamed among those blue-tinted bodies like a silver wand.

"Bethink you my brother," she continued as Croft recognized in her that Kalamita, that feminine magnet of flesh, who had tempted Cathur's Prince Kyphallos through the spell of her unclean charms, her unhallowed embrace, "would destroy or even mar the weapon in your hand?"

"Hai, by Bel," began Bandhor.

"Aye," his sister went on. "Where are Bandhor's eyes? Call on Bel and you will, yet have you not sacrificed to him enough of blood to glut his heart, without adding this? See you not this is a man of importance—and one to me before this described? Mark you not the closeness of the hair upon his head, his stature? Know you not that before you stands the Mouthpiece of Zitu of whom Tamarizia boasts—him to whom Zollaria must mark the score of her defeat, her loss of Mazhur? Rather than for gaining information can Bandhor not think of a better way in which such a one may be used?"

"Hai—you mean a ransom, Kalamita my sister?" Bandhor burst out as she paused.

"Aye." The eyes of a tigress looked into Croft's as she answered, studied his every expression, marked the effects of her words. "Aye, Bandhor, and you and other captains—and the ransom—should be—large. Much should Tamarizia be asked in payment for her Mouthpiece of Zitu, who tumbles from the skies."

And suddenly she smiled as she broke off her flippant taunt—smiled and looked steadily into Croft's staring eyes.

"By Bel!" once more Bandhor roared. "The words of Kalamita are of wisdom. Go—Mamai. Take portions of the device from which he fell. See they are carried to Atla. Say that this man fell among us with them. Demand a parley, at which terms for his return shall be named."

"Aye, Bandhor!" One of the captains saluted and left the tent.

INWARDLY Croft writhed. Here was a pretty pickle, indeed, since by his own blunder he had become to Tamarizia a weakness rather than a strength—since because of it, Tamarizia would seem to be confronted with the choice of leaving him to fate or paying Mazzer's and Zollaria's price. And—he had caught all the meaning in the tawny depths of the Zollarian courtezan's eyes. That price would indeed be large.

And now she bent and whispered into Bandhor's ear and he nodded. "Bind

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him," he said, and pointed to Croft. "Lift him and bear him into my sister's tent. Place a guard about us when it is finished. That is all, my captains. We wait for word from Atla. Go!"

To resist were useless. Croft did not try. He stood passively while his hands and feet were trussed. Even then he was trying to think, to scheme some way out of the mess into which he had brought himself. And—a vague question roused as to Kalamita's object in having him carried into her own tent. Object he was sure there was, but it baffled him for the moment. Then he was lifted and borne beyond the flapping door through which she had entered, and laid on a pallet of skins beside a copper couch.

The woman followed, remained standing until his bearers had left, then approached and reclined on the couch from whence she could watch his eyes.

"Mouthpiece of Zitu," she began after a moment of contemplation, "Mouthpiece of Zitu, who tumbles from the skies."

Croft made no answer, and suddenly she left the couch and knelt beside him. "You are a handsome man, Mouthpiece of Zitu; am I not beautiful myself?"

"Yes," said Croft, since in a purely physical way she was no less than a creature to drive most men mad, and he knew that she knew it, and because of the knowledge, left none of her charms concealed.

"And"—she bent above him, closer, closer, until her reddened mouth seemed about to touch him, until her breath played softly against his cheek—"wisdom and beauty may accomplish much together, Mouthpiece of Zitu, think you not?"

So that was it—wisdom and beauty together. A sudden loathing—an impulse to put more space between that gleaming body, that blood-red mouth so very close above him, gripped Croft and shook him. But he kept it out of his voice and out of his eyes as he replied. "What mean you, Kalamita of Zollaria, you magnet of the flesh?"

She laughed—laughed with a note of exultation in the sound as though his words were a tribute to the power she knew was her own. "Why think you Kalamita saved you from the fire?"

Croft quibbled. "Said she not the reason in words?"

The woman frowned. "Think you Jadgor of Tamarizia will pay the price for you that Mazzer will ask?"

Croft knew that his heart leaped. He had been afraid—afraid—yet now he recalled Jadgor as he knew him—Jadgor who had bowed his haughty crest on the day just passed for Tamarizia, but never for himself. Turning the thought in his brain he forgot to answer.

"You know he will not." Almost Kalamita hissed. "And if not, is death preferable to life, power—love? Would prefer to lie in the ground, wise man of Tamarizia, or in Kalamita's arms? Wouldst prefer to give of your strength to Zollaria and her, or to the worms?"

MORE and more Croft sickened at her words. For this he had been brought into her private tent. There alone with this shameless woman he was to be intrigued, turned traitor, in spirit and body seduced. Almost instinctively he turned away his eyes. Her beauty had become a deadly menace—the perfume of her tinted flesh had become a stench. To him she was offering what to Cathur's prince had been given, which had made of the man's name a synonym for treason in his nation. And now once more she was speaking.

"Behold, we are alone. I can unbind you, and—Kalamita's couch is—wide."

"Aye, too wide, by Zitu!" suddenly Croft roared. "The need was too patent in its making to have foreseen the fact that width would be required. Sister of Bandhor, beautiful as the dream of a soul in the realms of Zitemku you may be, but—Jason of Tamarizia barters not the welfare of his nation for a moment's lust."

"So!" Kalamita rose and stood above him. Cruel was her red lips' smile, and cruel was the light that flashed from her oval, tawny eyes. "So, then, we know your name at last. Hark ye, Jason—for Kalamita's favor prouder heads than thine have bended down in the dust. Nor is her favor a thing to be lightly brushed aside. Wherefore and Jadgor pays not the price we ask, then the Mouthpiece of Zitu dies."

A space of time dragged past and Croft had not replied.

Suddenly Kalamita was again beside him. "Or, perhaps," she said in a softer fashion, "it is because of that maid of Aphur, of whom one has told me—that Jason turns aside. If so, forget her—and remember only that Kalamita also is a woman."

"Nay—by Zitu, and Azil and Ga, the

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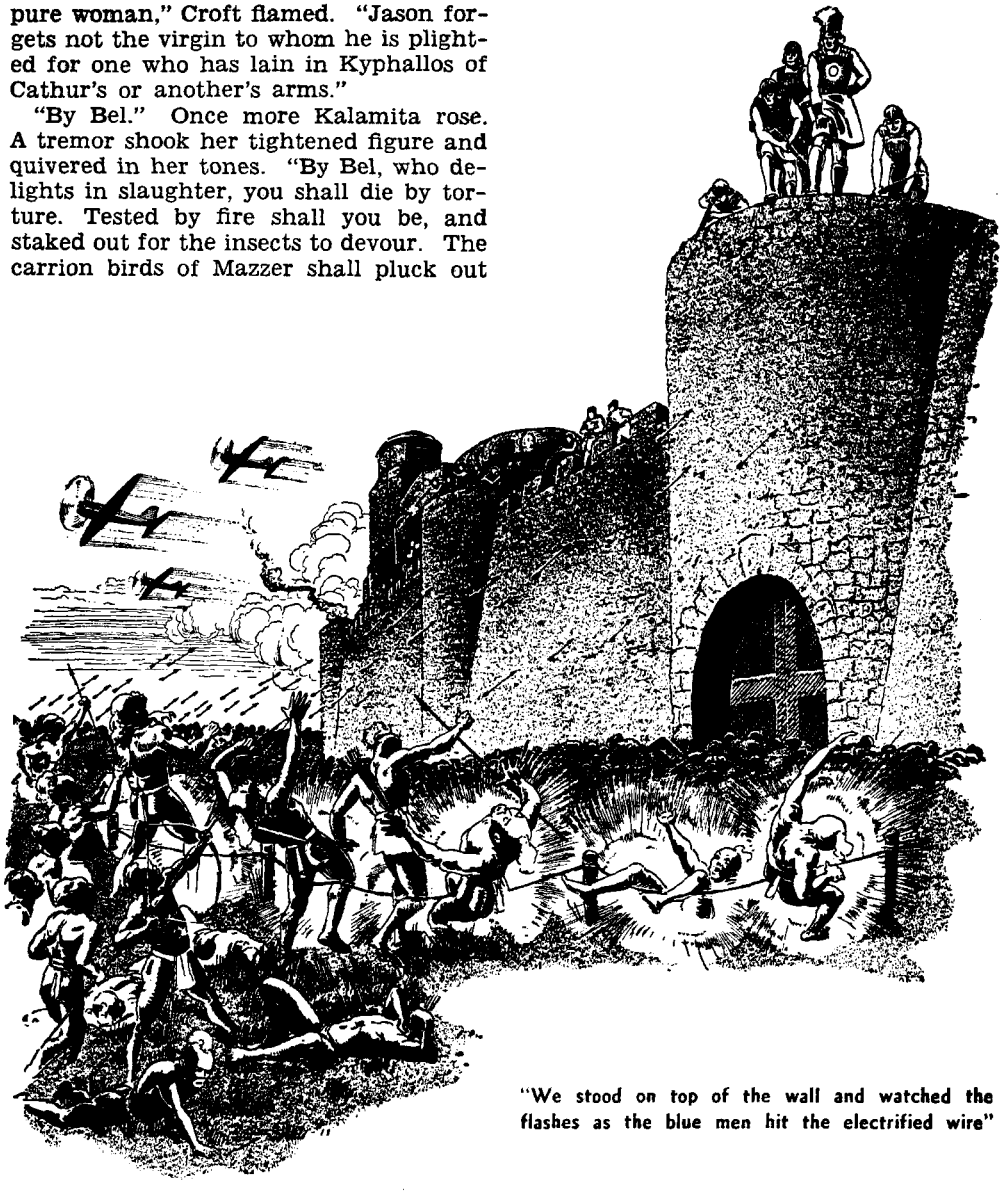
pure woman," Croft flamed. "Jason forgets not the virgin to whom he is plighted for one who has lain in Kyphallos of Cathur's or another's arms."

"By Bel." Once more Kalamita rose. A tremor shook her tightened figure and quivered in her tones. "By Bel, who delights in slaughter, you shall die by torture. Tested by fire shall you be, and staked out for the insects to devour. The carrion birds of Mazzer shall pluck out your beauty-blinded eyes. The beasts of the forest shall tear thy entrails from thee for thy words to me." She turned and went swiftly toward the flaplike door and flung it open. "Bandhor, O ay Bandhor!" she cried.



"We stood on top of the wall and watched the flashes as the blue men hit the electrified wire"

Her blue-stained brother appeared. They conferred together. Bandhor turned away.

But only for a moment longer were Croft and the woman alone. Then came Mazzerian soldiers, and lifting the trussed figure, bore it swiftly into the night through Bandhor's tent and to another, smaller, unlighted as to its interior, with naught for a floor save the grass-grown ground. And there they flung him down.

But Jason smiled. That quiet dark, the sweet, pure kiss of the grass beneath him was better than the atmosphere he had left. He stretched out his limbs so far as his bonds would let him and breathed a sigh of relief.

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And after a long time, as it seemed to his troubled senses, all his planning focused on Zud and Naia—dwindled down to those two words. Lying here, bound, practically doomed to die, he could yet communicate with them in the astral state. To Zud, whom he had taught to recognize his coming, he could go then, and even though thereby he made his own death practically certain, he would still serve best the Tamarizian states. And Naia—he quivered at the thought. Naia—as he knew her, would like himself, consider him unworthy if he did less than that Therefore he took a deep breath; he would go to Zud.

And swiftly as the thing was always accomplished when he so desired it, he was bending over the high priest's body, asleep in the Zitran pyramid.

"Zud," his spirit was calling. "The Mouthpiece of Zitu commands you. Come forth."

And Zud appeared. "Aye, Jason of Zitu," he quavered. "Zud is here."

"List ye, Priest of Zitu," Croft replied, and told him what had occurred. "Wherefore give ear further to my words. Go to Lakkon, and bid him, in Zitu's name, to send to Jadgor at Atla, advising him to hold out and seek for delay until the aid from Himyra arrives. Let it be said to him that Zollaria inspires all things which Mazzer requires. Let him know that through the power of the spirit which is mine, I shall inspire Naia of Aphur to cause Robur, his son, to come swiftly to Atla in person, to direct the use of the weapons that together with myself he understands, and that through you and Naia of Aphur, I shall keep him informed of all that transpires while yet my body survives."

"And thou—thou?" Zud faltered in distraught fashion, clasping his shadowy hands.

"I? I know not," said Jason. "My fortune is in Zitu's hands. To you I give this mission. Say that you understand."

"Zud hears, and Zud obeys."

Croft left him. His work was finished. He sought Himyra and Robur's palace, and Naia—his other self. And this part of his plan he felt would be the hardest, since in order to make her comprehend fully he must tell a painful truth—must confess that through his own daring was Jason at last undone—that his body lay prisoner to Mazzer, condemned if what he meant to attempt were accomplished, to what seemed inevitable death.

And suddenly, as he gained her chamber, Croft had the odd sensation that he stood before a tomb. Why it was he did not know at the moment, but it was as though he faced a ravished or an empty shrine. So strongly had he willed himself to this spot that the very concentration of his purpose had blotted out all else, and only now, when he reached it, did there come upon him the feeling that his coming here was vain.

Yet he crept inside. He moved swiftly toward her couch. In the dusk her form lay stretched upon it. But—it was motionless, with no stirring of the coverlet stretched above it, no evidence of breath. Pale as a lovely image it lay before him, in the semblance of what might be death.

FEAR—sheer, stark fear gripped Croft and held him through the span of a startled instant. And then he knew the truth. Because as he stood there it seemed to him that Naia of Aphur was calling—not from the form on the couch, but from somewhere else. "Jason—Jason—O Jason, my beloved!" that subtle cry rang out.

And it drew him. It compelled him. It was the voice of love—the voice of the affinity of the ages, soundless, as the spinning of the planets down the grooveless tracks of time—a blind thing, a mad thing, beyond all thinking in its sweetness—the voice of atom to atom—of the soft wind to the pollen—the voice of the bird to its mate—of the maiden to her lover—the ceaseless song of creation—the voice of God to man.

"Jason—O my beloved!"

It filled Croft's being. It engulfed him. It caught him up and carried him he cared not whither on the tide of a swift irresistible flood. It made of his astral substance no more than a straw swept up and off and about in an eddy of compelling force. It was more like that ceaseless urge which had drawn him from the Dog Star always while yet he dwelt on earth.

It carried Croft out of the palace and across the Central Sea. It swept him across Bithur, with its plains and night-wrapped woods. It drew him above the camp of the Mazzerian army, and inside that tent where his body lay stretched out upon the ground.

And then Croft understood—that Naia had accomplished for herself, what heretofore had been by him induced—that her spirit's love—her desire for knowl-

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edge, had enabled her soul to break the body's bonds. That as she suggested she might, in a former conversation, she had found the way to visit him in dreams.

Yes, Croft knew all this in a blinding flash of comprehension. Because—there in the little tent, its auric fires paling and glowing, its soft arms twined about his unconscious body, lay Naia's astral form.

She had come to find him. Suddenly it seemed to Croft that he might have known. And all at once he was glad, with a great unreasoning gladness that when she came, she had found him here alone, like this rather than in Kalamita's tent.

Then very softly, "Beloved," he let steal forth the soul call.

She heard. She lifted her head from where it had lain upon his breast. She turned its wide eyes toward him, and saw him and rose swiftly toward him, and into his embrace.

"Jason—I came to Atla, and could not find you. And I sought you—sought you. What is the meaning of this?"

"The plane fell. I told you always there was danger," he explained briefly. "I was taken prisoner by the Zollarian masters of the men of Mazzer. I am held to ransom for a price."

"Zitu!" Naia panted. "And what else?"

"I went in the spirit to converse with Zud, and send him on a mission to thy father," Jason told her, loath to answer her questions with a mere avowal of the numbing truth—that truth which as it seemed must blast their own hopes for the future, unless in some blind way he could contrive escape. "Through him I shall send word to Jadgor that the price must be refused."

"Refused?" Naia drew back slightly. Those quivering fires of her life force faltered, grew dim and uncertain, died down like a flame well nigh blown out by a deadening wind of fear. "But Jason—thy body—which I found lying—here?"

"Belongs to thee, while yet it survives," Croft answered slowly, and went on before she could find a reply. "Then went I to Himyra, and finding your form stretched on its couch, seemed to hear you calling, and returned to find you here. Listen, Naia, my beloved, you must find Robur and speak to him for me. To Jadgor you must send him, explaining what has befallen, telling him from me as the one Lakkon sent will tell him, that when Robur shall arrive to take charge of the motors and the riflemen of Aphur, they must strike, strike, strike until Bithur shall be freed. Also to Robur you must say he shall call on Nodhur and Milidhur to arm so quickly as they may, and send their men to reenforce and support Aphur. So shall Tamarizia vanquish Mazzer and once more defeat those things Zollaria plans."

"And—you ask me—to do this?" Naia faltered.

"Aye—for Tamarizia I ask it," Croft replied.

"But—you—you?" She glanced toward the tight-bound body.

Croft sought to stay her questions. "Look not there, beloved. I am here."

"But—unless this price of Mazzer you mentioned—be paid?" She would not be refused.

CROFT drew her to him. His position was perhaps rather more peculiar than that of any living man. The answer to what she had asked was death, and he knew it. Once he had snapped the astral cord that bound him to a body, but only after control of another had been gained. And that second body, the one he had made his own on Palos when he forsook earth because of the woman whose vital substance now glowed and paled against him, was the one which lay bound beside them on the ground. There was no other—the loss of it meant to him what the loss of physical life must mean to all men—nothing else. "If the price is not paid, it is easy enough to snap the cord that binds my life within it, at the proper time," he said at length.

"And," said Naia in a tone of horror, "you would ask me in taking your message to Robur, in sending him to Jadgor, to consign our love to death?"

"The price," said Croft in justification, "is very great. Much will Mazzer ask—more than by Tamarizia can be paid for one man's life."

Swiftly the auric fires leaped up in Naia's slender figure. "Is there no escape?"

"I know not," Croft made answer. "It is as Zitu wills. These Zollarians with the men of Mazzer have stained themselves blue. Yet whom have I to stain my body, were the stain within my grasp, or shave my hair and dye it red in time to make the venture? This tent is under guard, and will be, and the hands of my body are bound."

Naia considered. "And the price Mazzer will ask," she spoke slowly after a time, "is large?"

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"Aye, as large, I fear, as though the Zollarian war had been lost by Tamarizia and Mazhur not regained."

"And if not paid—your body—dies—and mine."

"Thine?" Croft tightened the grip of his arms upon her. "What mean you, maid of Aphur, by such words?"

"Aphur means what Aphur says," she returned, and looked him in the eyes. For a moment her own were steady, and then they wavered. She clung to him in an almost frantic agony of what seemed a momentary panic of more than mortal grief. Then that, too, had passed, giving way to an almost passionate mood. "Think you that when life has left your body, Naia of Aphur, too, shall not lie dead; that to her the body has longer any meaning, save as it delights you, save as through it she knows the touch of yours? Did you not swear to me by Zitu and Azil to return and claim me? And if that promise remains unfulfilled, think you that Naia of Aphur will live?"

"Yet," Croft stammered, shaken by this breath of passion, dazzled by the flashing of her being's fire, "if the welfare of Tamarizia demands the failure of that promise—if not with honor can I return to Himyra in the body. If your words, beloved, make doubly hard my purpose, when you shall have left me and returned to carry my message to your cousin—"

"By Zitu—and by Zitu," Naia fired into desperate protest, "it shall not be. Azil, giver of life! Shall these foul spawn of Zitemku keep you from me? Nay, as I am a daughter of Ga, with your seal upon me, now Ga speaks to me!" She broke off and lifted her hands to her breast. Her very eyes were fired.

So for a moment she stood before she went on. "Hark you, Jason, whom I love more than my own soul. This tent is guarded as you have said, and a price is laid on Tamarizia for your returning. Yet am I not woman whom you have wakened for nothing, and my love is not in vain. What price for a man who is dead?"

"By Zitu!" Croft caught her meaning. His glance turned toward the body on the ground beside their feet.

And Naia nodded. "Aye—Gaya told me in speaking of those things you told to Robur and to Zud, and now I know for myself that when the spirit is without it, the body lies as dead. Wherefore were it possible for you to remain as now you are for a space sufficient to deceive these men of Mazzer into thinking that injured in your fall you perchance had died—think you they would keep your body under guard or even near them, lest it foul the air even like those rotting corpses which tainted it with horror as I passed this night by Atla's walls?"

"No by Zitu—they would cast it forth in some other place," Croft answered quickly. "Naia—Ga—priestess of life, you have said it. Together we shall beat them yet."

"Aye, we shall beat them. Listen further," Naia said. "For a few suns you shall appear to be alive, yet faint and not recovered from injury. To Himyra shall I return and carry your message to Rob. When seven suns beginning with the next are passed, then must you seem to die. Thus shall they carry you forth. But the seven days shall be to gain time for what you direct to be done. Hai, I am not daughter of Ga for nothing. Beloved—give me your mouth. I must be gone."

Life! Life and this woman! There was a chance. Her wits had found it where his had milled around. Daughter of Ga was she as she said—and perhaps Ga—the eternal woman, *had* spoken to her through the elements which went into forming her nature first. Croft took her once more closely into his arms.

"Seek not to leave your body for one moment between now and the end of the seventh sun," she cautioned, "lest one should note it and so at the proper time entertain a doubt of your real death."

Croft marveled. To him she seemed to think of each infinitesimal detail. "No," he gave his promise. "I shall be merely as one who from one sun to another fails."

Naia lifted her lips. And as once before in similar fashion, she yielded them to him. For an instant it was as though their two beings blended, intermingled, and then she had torn herself from him, divinely glowing. "Zitu keep you, beloved," she whispered, and vanished from before his eyes.

FOR the succeeding seven days Croft endured—simply endured discomfort—the trussing up of his arms and feet at night in none too gentle fashion, the scant irregularity of poorly furnished meals, the absence of aught save trampled grass to sleep upon, renewed attempts on the part of Bandhor to force from him some intimation of Tamarizia's

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plans—the haughty, venomous hate that glared out of Kalamita's tawny eyes—that fury of a woman of the purely physical type, whose allurement has been scorned—of an adventuress, a schemer, whose scheme has failed.

But on the seventh day, as he lay brooding in his tent, close by the huge skin headquarters tent of Bandhor, which reminded him more of some Tatar chieftain's domicile than anything else, with its hide walls, its semibarbaric trappings, its red-and-green standard floating on a pole before its door, the door of his own tent was drawn slightly to one side and a face appeared to send his heart leaping into his breast.

Maia, Naia's own maid, was looking shrewdly into his starting eyes. And as lost in a maze he lay staring at her, filled with a vast wonder at her presence here in the heart of the Mazzerian camp, yet afraid to speak—torn between a desire to learn the meaning of her presence and a fear lest any sign of recognition should destroy whatever purpose that presence might portend, she flung the flap entirely back and darted inside.

"Thou canor of Tamarizia!" she cried in the voice of a termagant—a shrew—and struck him with her right hand a smart blow. "Thou foul offspring of Zitu fallen to the ground—thou devil who sent fire against my people, whose own people have cast him off, die—like the canor thou art!" And all the time she was shrieking she continued to buffet him with blows, striking him with her bare hand, kicking him with her feet. "Die, thou pale-faced fiend, whom Bel—greater than thy Zitu struck down and hurled among us—die—die now!"

But Croft, under the storm of her words, her buffetings, made no movement of resistance, lay limp and unresisting on the grass. Because even as she struck him, even as she lashed him with her tongue, calling him fiend and devil and canor—the name of the great beasts such as Naia's pet and protector, Hupor, which was the nearest approach in Palos to a dog; yet as her one hand rose and fell above him, her other drew from the narrow apron about her blue loins a little looped silver cross, and showed it to him briefly and thrust it back, and between the anathema of her lips they moved in almost soundless speaking. "Hupor—give ear to my berating of thee closely. I come from one who loves thee greatly—to show you the cross."

The cross ansata—the looped symbol of life—the little sign Zud had placed in Naia's hands at their betrothal—the sign of immortal life which came to men through women—Naia of Aphur was sending it by this servant of hers, who loved her, to him! He closed his eyes and nodded slightly in understanding as Maia continued to rave. Only now his brain was whirling, seething; was a caldron of troubled questions he dared not voice—questions as to why Maia had been sent to aid in his escape, as he felt sure now she had. Yet to question the girl were impossible under the present conditions, and what was she screaming?

"Die—thou canor—die as Bandhor has decreed thou must, since Jadgor has refused thy ransom! Die now—thou Tamarizian dog!"

And she had told him to listen closely to her vituperations. Croft gained the message she intended. Jadgor had done as he advised, and Bandhor's captive had lost value. Wherefore he kept his eyes closed, and seemingly died.

Footsteps! Croft's guard burst through the door. He seized Maia and flung her to one side, and stooped above the body with a face of terror. And then he straightened and turned upon her. "By Bel, you have killed him!" he stammered. "He has been ailing ever since he fell among us. Fool that I was to listen to your plea to view him. May Bel send you our commander's rage."

"That rage," Maia said, panting as it seemed from her exertions and emotions, "seeing that he is of value no longer, should not be so intense."

"Come!" The guard seized her by an arm and led her toward Bandhor's tent.

Croft went along, trailing the man and woman's steps. And once inside the huge shelter of skins, the guard saluted sharply and hurled Maia before the Zollarian noble, so that she sprawled her length on the ground.

"Behold, O Bandhor"—he made his report in a gruff bluster designed to cover his own face as well as he could—"this woman who made her way by stealth into Jason of Tamarizia's tent and struck him so that he died!"

"Hai!" Bandhor half rose, and sank back and narrowed his eyes. He regarded Maia, who groveled before him, her body caught and held, half raised, on stretching arms, her head lifted, gazing into his startled face with watchful eyes.

"How are you called?" he inquired.

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"Maia," stammered the woman. "Child am I of a father and mother who have lived among his people. All my life have I served them until Bel sent Bandhor and my father's people to bring liberation. Then I slipped away and made my way to thy army, with which I have stayed the past sun. Wherefore, hearing that Bandhor had condemned this one to death, I desired to see him and, seeing him, rage overcame me, and I threw myself upon him. Mercy, O Bandhor, mighty commander of my people, for this which I have done."

"Hai!" said Bandhor again, his lids contracting still further. "After all, it is a small matter, though my sister will be annoyed. She had planned a more lingering death for this insolent man. Yet to death was he condemned, and it is finished. Say you that from the bondage of his people you have come?"

"Aye, from Atla, lord."

"Atla! Now, by Bel!" Bandhor roared. "And what inside the penned-up city do these white spawn plan?"

"They speak of resistance," Maia made answer, "as Bandhor knows. But perchance he knows not that many men from Aphur have arrived, armed with the chariots they call moturs, which run by fire, and breathe it forth as death, and with the sticks that throw death unseen with noise and smoke, unlike the flight of an arrow or spear. Ten thousand have reached Bithra, and are advancing to the relief of Atla even now. More are said to be journeying from Aphur across the Central Sea, and yet others from Nodhur and Milidhur are to come."

"Hai!" For the third time Bandhor said it with a heavy frown. "This is of importance. For the information your words contain, I give you pardon—were those other of thy father's children in Tamarizia as loyal—much might be wrought of ill among them were their caste of servants to rise and kill and burn. Go!" He turned to the guard, whose face had lightened. "Take men and bear forth this body, and cast it beyond the camp. Or hold! I will view him myself." For the third time his eyelids narrowed, and he rose.

FOLLOWED by Maia and the guard, he entered Croft's tent and bent over the body on the ground. "Aye—his spirit has left him," he said as he straightened from the inspection and swung about on his heel.

"Mighty Bandhor," Maia stayed him. "I may remain for a time in the camp."

Bandhor eyed her. "Oh, aye," he said in careless fashion. "You are a comely girl of your people; you should have small trouble in finding some man to take you to his tent."

He turned away, and a moment later a brazen trumpet began sounding a summoning blast. As Croft learned, this was a signal to Bandhor's captains and advisers to assemble for a council with their chief.

Maia stole out with the arm of the guard about her, walking coyly at his side. Quite plainly the fellow was inclined to take Bandhor's suggestion about her to himself. Croft watched them vanish, and remained beside his own body, still huddled on the grass.

And in the end he followed it—followed his own body when it was borne outside the limits of the encampment and cast into a thicket of bushes, where its disposition was watched by Maia, who accompanied the now openly amorous guard and lingered beside the thicket with him after the other soldiers had cast down their burden and gone.

"Let us remove its clothing," she suggested. "To waste it were a loss."

The guard assented.

Five minutes later, more than a little aghast, Croft found his material tenement stretched stark upon the ground. Maia and her lover were moving off. In her arms the girl bore his suit of soft, brown leather.

In a way now Croft became more and more disturbed. Vague fancies filled his mind. At the first he had trusted her wholly, but this last move he did not understand. He recalled the story Parthys had told of the blue servants rising against their employers during the present trouble, and he marked the manner in which she accepted the blue man's advances.

After all, she was a Mazzerian herself, he thought, and there was no reason save her possible affection for Naia to insure her worthiness of trust. Still—she had shown him the tiny cross from the apron about her waist, and she had told him to die, as Naia had advised he should. After all, she might have some definite reason beyond his present knowledge for divesting his body of clothes. And he could do nothing until nightfall. That being the case, and the night being several hours removed, there was nothing

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to do but wait. Dead it might be in seeming, yet Croft knew that lying thus in the open his body needed protection. In the middle of the thicket he settled down beside it. It was rather odd, he found himself thinking, to be sitting there keeping an invisible watch of his own form.

Now and then, as the afternoon passed, he stole a glance at the camp. There was bustle there, a moving and shifting of men. It came to him that Bandhor, after his council, was preparing for another attack of Atla, urged thereto by Maia's report concerning the approaching reinforcements of weapons and men. Well, let them attack, he thought with a grim satisfaction. Jadgor would hold out through yet one more attack surely, and by then Bandhor would have lost his chance, once Robur and his forces had arrived.

Night came at last. Purposely Croft waited until late before making his venture at escape. And while he waited, there stole into the thicket a dim shape, which approached his body and sank beside it on the ground.

It was Maia. More than a little surprised, Croft watched her. She carried a bundle. She undid it. She moved higher beside his body and raised his head, supporting it on her thighs. Then swiftly she began to shave it, turning it to reach the back, and working rapidly on the sides. That done, while comprehension flashed into Croft's mind, and with it renewed confidence in this girl, as he recalled his words to Naia concerning some such thing as this, she took a small box from her bundle and began rubbing the scalp-lock she had left upon his poll with a substance it contained. After that she lifted a flask and removed a stopper. Working rapidly, she began smearing the body with some dark fluid, spreading it thinly upon the skin, rubbing it to as even a coating as she might with rapid hands. And as she worked Croft's body lost its ivory whiteness and became a dark-hued thing like her own. At the end she took a small cloth from the articles she had brought with her and twisted it deftly about his loins.

And as she finished and straightened herself from her labors, Croft, sensing it time for his reviving, opened the eyes of the body over which she had worked and spoke.

"Hai," said Maia, without any particular evidence of consternation. "It is even so she said it would happen when I had finished. She said that when I had shaved you, lord, and reddened your hair, and stained your body, and put the loin-cloth upon it, you would reappear."

"She?" Croft questioned her quickly. "You mean Naia of Aphur, Maia?"

"Aye. Who else, Hupor Jason?" She rose and picked up her bundle. "Naia, my mistress. These are your garments. Come, Hupor, till I lead you to her. She lies near."

CHAPTER XX

THE BLUE GIRL OF APHUR

SHE lies near! Croft's senses reeled and then steadied into the blinding truth —the sweetness of it, the full meaning of it—and yet the possible peril to her whom it concerned.

Naia of Aphur lay near him—had come to his rescue.

Then—then—seven days before she had not told him all the plan she had in mind. She had told him only the essential portion which most closely concerned himself—and the rest—this thing—the part which dealt with her aid and assistance when the time for it should arrive, she had left unspoken, knowing no doubt he would forbid her risking her own integrity in an effort to succor him.

For an instant he thrilled with blended feeling, and then he spoke to Maia. "You mean?"

"That she lies hid some distance beyond the camp of thy enemies, Hupor. Come."

"But—" Croft found himself confused by the manner of Naia's presence. Barely seven days had passed since she must have wakened in Himyra after their astral conversation in the tent where he lay bound. The time was not sufficient to brand Maia's words as truth. And yet Croft knew that he believed them. How, then, had Naia come?

Almost with impatience Maia interrupted. "Seven suns from now she waked from her slumber, Hupor, in a most strange mood. For the Hupor Robur she sent me, and for long they spoke together, and after that she spoke with me again. Bidding me place her in the garment she wears when she dares to rise in the air, she took me with her to the great house where the thing she rides is kept, and compelled me to enter it with her, so that my spirit turned as weak as water

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when, with a great roaring, we leaped into space."

"Zitu—you mean she flew to Bithur?" Croft's stained chest rose sharply. His eyes began to flash.

"Aye, Hupor—partly in the air like a bird, and partly on the water like a boat—which, praise to Zitu, was calm, and with wonderful speed."

"But fuel—what is burned in the motor?" Jason questioned.

Maia shrugged. "Her lips, not mine, should tell you how, like a bird to its mate, she came to seek thee, Hupor," she admonished. "Yet—were not the great galleys already seeking to reach Bithur with men and weapons by the Hupor Robur's orders? And though he swore by Zitu and Azil she should not undertake this madness, he did not refuse to his cousin that which would spell her death. On the waves we rode beside the galleys when the thing that makes the motor turn was required."

"My God!" Croft spoke not as a man of Tamarizia, but of earth. Naia had solved all difficulties, driven by the desire of saving him from the results of his own misfortune. She had overcome all obstacles in her desire to reach him. And this was love—the flight of Naia of Aphur, as the blue girl had phrased it, like that of a bird to its mate.

"On the night of the sun before this we came down in an open place in the forest," Maia explained further. "There the great wings we rode on lie hid. And some distance farther in this direction she awaits thee, Hupor. Come."

"Aye," said Croft, and caught a great, a wondrous breath of realization. "Aye, come." And now as he moved off, where he had delayed before he seemed fired by an all-compelling haste.

To reach her—to meet her—to greet her and gather her into his arms! To hold her, sense the strength, the softness, the ripened glory of her; to hold her, and know that no matter how beautiful she was in body, the beauty and strength of her spirit was no less. To hold her and know, realize, feel that the beauty, the strength, the glory of both soul and body were his. He started out of the thicket at a pace that made Maia gasp:

"Walk not so quickly, Hupor, and permit that I walk at thy side. Seen we may be of many, and though thou are stained to the seeming of a man of Mazzer, yet were it best that you seem also not as one in haste, but as a man who strolls through the camp with a woman at his side."

"Aye." Croft nodded in understanding and slackened his stride. "Aye—Maia—yet lead me to her as quickly as you can."

Their course led them after a time into the depths of the gloomy forest, where the moons were blotted out or their light filtered in streaming tatters through the trees. And there Croft spoke again to his companion.

"I failed to understand when you put it into the mind of the guard to make way with my clothes."

MAIA made a clicking sound suggestive of an almost impish amusement as she answered. "But—since I was to paint your body, Hupor, it was easier for me to bring the pigments wrapped inside them, when I slipped away from him after he had drunk wine into which I had dropped a substance to induce heavy slumber I had brought with me inside my girdle band. Indeed, we three appear now no more than as other children of Mazzer. My mistress, when we come upon her, will seem no other than myself."

"You mean you have stained her?" Jason questioned.

"Aye, lord, from the roots of her golden hair to her graceful heels. For two suns, as I have told you, has it been needful for her to lie in the open while I made my way to the camp and performed my mission, and had any come upon her—"

She turned aside and swept back a screen of branches. She plunged through and came into a break in the forest close to the banks of a tiny stream across a little glade. And there she pursed her lips and sent quivering through the moonlight what seemed a nightbird's call.

It was answered. Maia repeated, and paused, and whistled again. Then touching Croft on the arm, she urged him forth from the shadow until he stood revealed in the rays of the Palosian moons.

And from the shadows beyond him another shape appeared. Slight it was and slender, graceful as a faun, as it came swiftly toward him on flying feet, graceful as a dryad of the forest in its every supple, sweeping line save for where it was girdled by a band of white.

So much Croft saw, and advanced to meet it, and found it Naia, veiled as she stood before him from head to waist in the heavy cloud of her auburn-tinted hair.

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And then she lay against him—his arms were straining her to his breast, and that cloud of ruddy hair was like the kiss of satin against his naked chest. And her hands were clinging to him, her arms were holding him fast.

"Jason, beloved," she panted, "you are safe—uninjured, alive!"

"Yes—thanks to you, beloved, and to Maia," Croft replied, and kissed her.

"Thou"—Naia of Aphur flung up her head and turned to the girl of Mazzer—"thou who this night have brought me more than life or anything besides—thou shall never leave me—thou shall remain always with me—and with him. My children you shall cradle in your arms—and if love comes to you as to me and offspring, I swear it—to me they shall be as mine."

"My mistress," Maia faltered, bending her head before Naia.

"Nay—you are my sister," said Naia, smiling, and took her by the hand. And after that she spoke again to Croft. "Yet—I am forgetting. Not yet are we free from danger. Thrice today have men roamed through the forest while I hid me beneath the leaves. But thy huge bird waits to bear us high above them. Come, beloved, come."

For an hour after that, his arm about her, or walking hand in hand—as though now they were once more together they sought the assurance of the fact through every thrilling sense—they hurried on. And then once more the moonlight filled all the bowl of a tree-ringed opening in the forest, and struck dull gleams from the copper body of the waiting airplane. Huge, impotent, in seeming, it squatted there, waiting their touch to wake it; its interlacing struts and trusses making a spider-webbed pattern in shadow on the ground.

Naia drew her ruddy tresses about her as they stepped into the forest meadow.

"Put on your flying garments now, beloved," she prompted, "while Maia and I find ours and put them on."

Five minutes later Croft lifted both women to their seats. Then as Naia, save for her strained face and changed hair, very much herself in her brown flying garments, took her place at the control, he seized the blades of the propeller and sent the engine round.

THE plane swung with them like some monster bat beneath the skies. It turned. It rushed off under Naia's guiding, its vanes all silvered now like the top of the forest in the moonlight, bearing its burden of renewed life and love.

Far, far away on the plain where Croft had lain captive, still winked the light of fires. They came closer, closer, as the airplane ate through the trackless distance—were beneath it—were left behind.

Around, in a monster circle—a descending spiral. Once more around. Again and again in a vast, wide turning, sinking lower and lower down. The lights on the Bith were closer. Closer the fire-urns burned. Below was the wide-flung reach of the street along the river, and straight above it the airplane swung. The hum of the motor died, and the night wind sang in a sinking whisper past it. It slipped down a long hill of air and sped along the ground.

And as it stopped, as Croft lifted Naia from her seat, from the entrance of Atla's palace there dashed a chariot drawn

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by gnuppas, their plumes tossing, bearing down on the plane with flying feet. Straight as though driven in a race, it approached and paused, with the gnuppas on their haunches. Robur of Aphur flung aside its silklike curtains and sprung down.

"By Zitu—and by Zitu, my friend—my brother—and thou, Naia, my cousin, thou chosen of all Zitu's children!" he cried, all poise or thought of dignity vanishing as he caught them in his arms.

THEY entered the carriage and reclined upon the padded cushions, the princess commanding Maia to take a place at her side. They were driven to the palace, and there Croft was led to a room. And there attendants labored until the last of the blue pigment vanished, and his skin merged from beneath it a most surprising pink from the necessary force they used. As for the ruddy scalplock, he had it shaved off as the simplest way of settling the matter regarding his hair. He was glowing, both literally and with the thoughts induced by the manner of his escape and return when Robur appeared.

Bidding the servants fetch his customary garments, leg-cases, tunic, helmet, and metal cuirass, he dismissed them and proceeded to clothe himself.

"Hai!" Robur eyed him. "As once before I remarked, thou art 'a sight.' And a sight thou art for more than the eyes of a maid, Jason, my friend. In Zitu's name, what chanced to the airplane that thy plans went wrong? In Atla there was well-nigh a panic when you failed of your return."

Croft explained, and Robur nodded.

"Aye, it was the same with the motors when they 'stalled,' and they knew not how to start them; and as you have explained to me, there is small time to work upon a motor in the air. My father, however, swore it was a judgment of Zitu against him for his stand of the past few Zitrans toward thee. Then came Zud and Lakkon with your message, and word that fresh men and weapons were assured to lighten his cares."

"And the dynamo, Rob?" Croft questioned, buckling his cuirass straps and standing once more appareled in silver and gold, with the wings and cross in blue upon his breast.

"Lies on a galley even now beside the quays," Robur replied. "What of it, Jason? You have a plan?"

"Yes," Croft nodded as he laid a hand on his sword. "A plan to show that its wires as well as light, may build a cordon about Atla's walls, to touch which shall mean death. Then let Mazzer's Zollarian-commanded horde attack."

"Aye—say you so." Robur gained his feet. "Two thousand riflemen are with me; four times their number come from Bithra, and should arrive tomorrow. Nodhur and Milidhur will send us others. Also, there are the motors—twelve, all numbered—and the remaining airplanes, with men who know how to fly them to some extent. Aye, let Mazzer and her Zollarian leaders attack. But if you are ready, come. I was sent to bid you to a feast."

"A feast?" Croft eyed him sharply.

And Robur smiled. "Aye, a feast in quality, my friend, if not in numbers," he replied. "Come along, you favored one of Zitu. Naia of Aphur acts hostess tonight to her lord."

Yet even so, Croft did not understand as he followed his friend to a small apartment where a table was spread, and found Medai of Bithur, Jadgor, Lakkon, Zud, and Naia, already reclining on the couches ranged about the board. Nor did he consider greatly, after he had gripped the hand of each man present and looked into old Zud's eyes with a glance of mutual understanding, and taken the place at Naia's side she indicated by a gesture of her hand.

She was in white—all save the golden fabric of her girdle where against the glistening background the seal of Azil blazed. Save only for that spot of color, white as the robe of a vestal, her garment showed. White even were the sandals and leg cases on her feet and tapering calves—of white leather as thin and soft as kid. White, too, were the stately plumes above her hair, once more a shimmer of gold. And her lips were scarlet as a poppy, and her eyes twin lakes of pansy purple, and softly pink, as the blush of innocence itself, her warm skin glowed.

Wherefore Croft was content to put by all consideration to eat; to drink of the wine before him with his lips, of Naia with his eyes; listen to the congratulations of the others stretched about the tables, while the harps of musicians hidden somewhere out of sight were softly played.

Nor did he dream that anything beyond the celebration of their safe return

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was toward, until old Zud, rising, signaled them to rise.

So that, all uncomprehending, he obeyed and rose, and giving Naia his hand, assisted her to her feet, and stood in silence waiting for the priest to speak; becoming aware as he did so that the others had also risen and were standing with their eyes on Naia and himself.

"Children of Zitu, I give ye to one another. May he send his blessings upon you, as I, his priest give—mine."

So spake Zud of Zitra, high priest of all Tamarizia, than whose words was no higher priestly voice.

And Naia, reaching down, unpinned the seal of Azil, and placed the gleaming jewel in his palm.

"O Jason, Jason," she stayed his halting question, "think you not that in our case custom may be set aside? See you not that so I compelled Zud to promise—before I flew above Atla's walls to find you—that if we returned together, it should be so—tonight?"

And then Croft comprehended all the sweetness of her planning. And drew her into his arms and held her—held her until it seemed that all else faded away and there was naught in the world save their two selves.

"My bride," he said; "my—bride."

CHAPTER XXI

LOST CONFIDENCES

THIS is the story told me by the lips of the sorry wreck on the bed, the spirit that looked out of its eyes—Croft's spirit, as I have every reason to believe, since he so frankly admitted what he had done, and because every detail of the narrative itself showed complete familiarity with the events embraced in the story Croft in his own earthly body had told me before.

"And that's all—or practically all—Murray," he said at last with a sigh and laid his cigar aside. "I've done a lot of things since then, and Tamarizia bids fair to develop into a very up-to-date nation; only I needed information concerning a lot of things in regard to which I was lacking. It was to gain this information I reversed my first experiment in changing bodies. Will you help me to what I need?"

"I'll help you, of course," I told him; "but what about the Mazzerian invasion?"

He gave me a glance, and the light in his eye was quietly amused.

"Lord, man, I was forgetting. To me it seemed that the moment in which I knew Naia mine was the logical ending. But we beat them. Hadn't I gained what I went to Palos to attain? Small chance that Zollaria's blue rabble could accomplish the revenge for which she schemed.

"Rob and I went to work the next day. We put about a thousand riflemen on the walls. And then we went outside and set up a lot of posts about twenty feet from the base of the walls. Ugh!—it was nasty work—with all those rotting corpses under foot. But we got them up while the riflemen kept the blue men back out of arrow range, and then we hitched one end of our wire to an armed motor and pulled it about the walls. In the meantime, however, we had to repulse an attack. On the second day Bandhor sent about ten thousand Mazzerians against our defenses, and we rolled them back considerably less in numbers than when they started, though I must say they fought like devils, and for a while it was pretty warm work.

"We had quite a time getting the wire strung, too, because they used to slip in and cut it down at night, so that finally, while I was rigging up a motor to run the dynamo and generate the current I meant to charge the wire, we gave it up. Then, when the motor was properly harnessed, we took a couple of cars and ran half-way around the walls each way between daylight and dark, and hooked the two ends up. And that night, you can take my word for it, the Mazzerians found trouble when they came up to undo our work. All you had to do was to stand on top of the wall and watch the flashes when those blue men hit the wire. Robur thought it was about the best piece of work I had accomplished yet.

"By that time, however, the eight thousand from Bithra had come up, and we began to get ready to stage our own attack. Murray, the present war was just started when I went to Palos first. But at the time I defeated Helmor, of Zollaria, these tanks I've been reading about in the papers the past few days hadn't been thought of, let alone used, on earth. That's one instance in which Tamarizia beat this more advanced planet."

"It was a man of earth who did it," I pointed out.

"Well—possibly, yes." Croft laughed.

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"What I started to say, however, was that I seem to have in a measure duplicated their performance and manner of offensive use myself. We used them to break the first resistance of the opposing line and pave the way for the infantry attack. You will recall the success of their work against Helmor's army in the Zollarian campaign. Well, they made good again.

"We sortied from Atla, with the motors in advance. Under a screen of rifle fire from the walls, we moved them out of the gates and placed them back of the wire, and filled them with men and grenades. And I picked two men Naia had trained in flying better than I could have done it myself. I suppose, Murray, fliers, like other men with some special aptitude, are born as much as made. My wife is a born aviatrix—nothing less. She'll do things with a plane I daren't attempt, and she'd licked two of the hangar crowd into mighty decent shape. I took them, and we used three planes and about a ton of bombs. Naia wanted to go along, but I wouldn't let her, but I know she went up on the walls with Lakkon and watched.

"Rob led the motor squadron and I the planes. We gave Bandhor's army everything at once. Jadgor had charge of the foot forces. And when everything was ready the sortie began.

"The motors advanced straight over the wire in which the power was turned off. I took my planes over the walls from the concourse along the Bith, and hit the blue army first with a shower of bombs. That upset them more or less. I honestly think the sight of the planes themselves shook them as much as anything else.

And, of course, Robur made contact with his armored cars before they had steadied themselves. They fought—oh, yes, they fought, but they were beaten from the first. They tried to stall the motors and overturn them as they had when Jadgor used them against their army first. But this time they didn't stall, or not for long at a time—and what of the enemy weren't shot by the men inside them either ran away or were crushed. One did get stuck in the timber, and was in a pretty bad way until Robur himself got to it and drove the Mazzerians about it off. On the whole, however, they did splendidly, and tore some awful gaps in Bandhor's line.

"THE infantry, coming up to the attack behind them, finished the work. Inside thirty minutes there wasn't any real army before us so much as the fragments of an army fighting where they fought at all, in small, disorganized bands. Thousands ran away in bodies. Hundreds hid in the woods. The riflemen mopped them up in droves. In a surprisingly short time Rob broke clear through the line with three of the motors, and got out of the fringe of forest between Atla and that great plain where Bandhor had his tent. And as luck would have it, he was just in time. Bandhor was about to leave. Rob"—the eyes of the man on the bed twinkled—"suggested in a somewhat urgent fashion that he remain—and his sister with him. I mustn't forget Kalamita at the last. He stuck both of them into one of the motors under guard and sent them straight back inside Atla's walls, and after that, what with the planes above them and the two remaining motors—Rob's own and the other—the Mazzerian army met a warm reception when it streamed out of the forest upon that plain. The end came right there. Mazzer's organized force broke up. It quit cold and ran. For a week we were hazing them in small bands out of Bithur, but they never stiffened up enough to offer a real fight again."

"And what about Bandhor and his sister?" I inquired.

Croft smiled. "I have every reason to think they were surprised to find me alive. I know Bandhor swore when we met the first time, and Kalamita turned a bit whiter that I had ever seen her before. We held them, Murray. Zollaria found out two could play at the same ransom game. Only Zollaria paid—a million sesterons, which, you may appreciate, is equivalent to about a million pounds. I hardly think she'll care to try conclusions with Tamarizia very soon again."

"And since then you've gone on introducing innovations, I suppose?" I said.

He nodded. "Yes. Naia and I went to Lakkon's mountain house. He gave it to us for our own. There were a lot of associations about it, and I was glad to accept it for a dwelling. As I told you, Tamarizia bids fair to come up to date. We're printing papers in Himyra and Zitra now, my friend. We've established a system of free schools. Now I'm after more rapid means of communications mainly—we've a sort

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of telephone—short-distance lines which I want to improve, and I want to establish telegraph and wireless. Astral communication may do between harmonized minds, but it's too much to expect to educate a people into anything like that.

"Also, I want to improve the medical caste. Oh, I've done a lot, but I want to do a million things yet. So I talked it over with Naia, and we decided that I should come back—reverse the experiment. We've been back in the astral condition, of course, more than once. I've brought her with me—shown her earth. She understands—and she's waiting for my success in this matter even now, up there in the mountains where I told her I loved her first. And see here—it may be that some attendant will tell you I'm pretty sound asleep almost any night. If I take the notion I'm apt to slip up to tell her how things are going along. So—if that happens, don't let it fuss you—though, with your understanding, I don't suppose it would. Anyway, I'll promise you now to give you warning when the work I came back for is done."

"And you're happy?" I questioned.

"Happy?" He gave me a strange glance. "Man, the word's inadequate. I've found the complement of my nature—speaking in that sense, I'm satisfied. And—as though that wasn't enough—it's five Zitrans now—six months about, as you estimate time, since Naia told me—that, in the quiet of the night, she had heard the whisper of Azil's wings. I—I don't know, Murray, both she and I hope it will be a boy—but whether it is or not—boy or girl, it is ours—the final proof of our love—of the blending of my life and hers."

I helped him. Of course I helped him. I did everything within my power to furnish him with the information he required. A month went by, and two, and nearly every night of that time we spent at least an hour in confidential talk.

And then, one night, he caught me by the hand and looked into my eyes and gripped my fingers hard. "I'm going, Murray," he said, smiling. "I've got what I came for, I fancy—so don't be surprised. And see here—Naia knows all about you. I've told her; and when I speak to her first in the flesh on Palos, I'm going to tell her how much you've contributed to the success of this undertaking. And if ever you give us a thought, you can feel that there's a woman—a wife and mother—up here on another star whose heart holds a warm spot for you—the one man on earth who knows our story—big enough—broad enough to refuse to balk at the truth."

I returned his gripping pressure, more than a little affected by his words. "Naia of Aphur is as real to me as I am myself," I replied. "And hang it, man—I—I wish I was up there with you. I'd like to be your physician. I'd consider it a privilege to watch the light in her eyes when they first see Jason Croft's son."

"Man," he said; "man, I could love you for that," and wrung my hand again.

IT WAS midnight when the night superintendent called and told me No. 27 had died.

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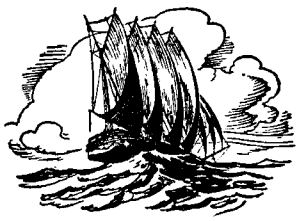

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Into the Infinite

By Austin Hall

Part II

The Rebel Soul! Under different names the world has known him . . . only too well. He was Alcibiades who crushed Athens in her pride. He was Alexander, Napoleon, Charles XII, and Kaiser Wilhelm . . . And the Rebel Soul was George Witherspoon, who, even as these others, knew self as his only law. Would he, like his prototypes, try to destroy the world and end by destroying himself? Or could his friends save him as they hoped, through the power of selfless love?

AFTER his adventures with George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul, Walter Warren became a prosperous banker, and lived happily with his wife and Roselle.

The Master, the leader of the powerful Order of the Sevens, told Walter that George had become an internationally famous criminal, and was known as the "King of Thieves." But he was sure that, unmoral and unfettered by human-made laws as he was, George had a great power for good in his nature, and unknown and unearthly powers for either good or evil, and he received Walter's promise of assistance in saving George from himself.

One night, in a storm, George came to Walter's home, told him that he had always loved him, and begged him to do what he could to save him from himself, at the same time warning him that in the future he would do him harm. One of the children was sick, and George cured him and left a valuable emerald in his hand. On the way out he met Roselle, and they loved each other at sight.

Walter received warning that Witherspoon was going to rob his bank. He reported the matter to police headquarters, and received promises of assistance from Simpson, the chief, a slow-witted ex-blacksmith, and Wilkins a detective connected with the Order of the Sevens and working under the Master's orders. Wilkins knew George's methods, and he had trailed him in many lands without being able to arrest him. On the night of the Christmas ball George robbed Walter's bank, in spite of guards and precautions. Later he appeared at his home and carried off Roselle.

Still later, the Master wrote that he had gone in search of Roselle and George. Two years passed. Then Walter's wife received a letter from Roselle saying that she and George were married and happy and telling of their travels in China and Russia, and of some of the extraordinary powers of her husband. This letter, written in the year 1900, is continued in this instalment.

CHAPTER XX

ROSELLE'S LETTER: CONTINUED

THAT was all. The first positive intimation that I had of the uncanniness of my husband! Though the scene upon the platform had been unaccountable, this climax following so closely after, and so inexplicable, proclaimed that he was a man whose powers were far out of the common.

I recalled the words of the old Chinese, and trembled at their portent. There is something weirdly mystic about all Orientals; he had bowed down to my husband, almost in worship. I remembered the reverential salutation that he had accorded my husband's smile at the bowing.

But had the Chinese been so foolish? What had just occurred had all come from my own imprecation. In my horror at the Russian's cruelty and cowardliness I had prayed for just this thing to happen.

How was I to know the supernatural that would spring into action at my mere volition? And if it was supernatural, was the Chinese so foolish in his submission? I must confess that it frightened me. It is one thing to be married to a splendid, handsome lover, and quite another to be wedded to a—being.

I remembered the strange tales I had heard about him, inexplicable, dazzling, puzzling; his radiation, his magnetism, his beauty. Even now as he sat beside me he was the very essence of cold nonchalance, every feature of his face was perfect, his eyes the proper shade, not a hair was ruffled. His hand stole down

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to mine and pressed it, the vitality that was his shot through me like a current; he had personality; he was greater, more splendid than all the world—I loved him.

For some time I was silent, then I spoke:

"George," I said, "tell me truly, did you do it?"

He smiled and continued chewing as though not a thing in the world had occurred that was unusual.

"What?" he asked, gazing out of the window with an abstract interest. His manner was one of indifference and total non-concern. After his derisive laugh he had drifted into unconcerned content, chewing his everlasting gum and gazing out at the dripping drabness of the wet snowfall. "Did I do what?"

He did not care; he shrugged his shoulders at a thing so trivial. But I exclaimed:

"This man, this Russian, this nobleman! How could it be? It was horrible; just like murder, the man was so helpless. Was it because I asked that he be punished?"

For a moment he forgot his gum and looked at me in querulous wonder, his eyes dancing with a thousand infinitesimal lights and laughter.

"Indeed, Roselle, you are right. Horrible, murder! Yes, you are right. So it always was and will be when one of his ilk has to take the ax.

"It was an exquisite pleasure, however, two days ago! Then it was the fine art of murder! He had it coming, Roselle. It was pleasant to watch him writhing."

Terrible! It pleased him! This man whom I loved, who was so beautiful and could be so gentle, was for all that as inexorable as a Moloch. Yes, and more so; he could derive out of cruelty all the exquisite delectations of a connoisseur.

Yet, in a way, I realized that he was right, that my remorse was to a great extent a girl's emotion. It had been my own imprecation, I had asked it and something inexplicable had wrought circumstances to my willing. I could but exclaim:

"It was supernatural, it was above all reason, how could you, how did you do it?"

For a moment he did not answer; the flintlike hardness flitted from his features and his eyes grew tender. He looked at me. Somehow, in all his moods, in all his thoughts, I can reach his better nature, he who to all others is as stone becomes as wax to my slightest whim and pleasure. He pressed my fingers.

"Listen, Roselle," he said. "I did it. I make the confession. You willed it, and it had to be done.

"You call it supernatural, but it is not so. There are a great many things, little one, on this earth, that we place in the category of the supernatural. But they are mostly things that we do not understand and for which we have no explanation.

"Of such, you will see many in the future, I wish to caution you. The little affair you have just witnessed came from your willing. Once you had stated your desire not all in the world could stop it.

"It was your will, Roselle. Yes, and your will is my will. I am your lover. Your merest whim to such as I, is the superlative of injunction.

"I cannot deny you. Were I to do so I would be overcoming the only impossibility that I know of. And remember, I cannot defy one single law of nature.

"You see, little one, I converse in riddles. Which is as it must be. Were I to go into detailed explanation you could not follow. Not a one on earth might understand what I might tell him."

Surely it was a poser. The scene with the Chinese—the terrible events of the past few days—caught me, clutched me with the smothering apprehension that some of the tales I had heard in my childhood might indeed be true.

For how else had he smitten the cowardly Russian? Without moving hand or muscle he had wrought a vengeance that was speedy and appalling.

And upon the platform; the burning saber? Though he had not quivered an eyelash he had done miracles. He asserted that it was not supernatural; that I had willed it. I was sick at heart to think that I had been the cause of bloodshed; even the blood of a brutal tyrant. But I thrilled, as I think almost any girl would, at the thought that I could so impose my will upon my husband.

IT WAS an ecstatic feeling to know that I could knead as clay this one, who, if he did but wish it, might rule all the world. Wherein, you see, I was very much a girl.

"Then," I spoke, "as long as you love, you will obey me. You shall be ruled by a woman."

He laughed.

"Hardly that, Roselle. I shall go my

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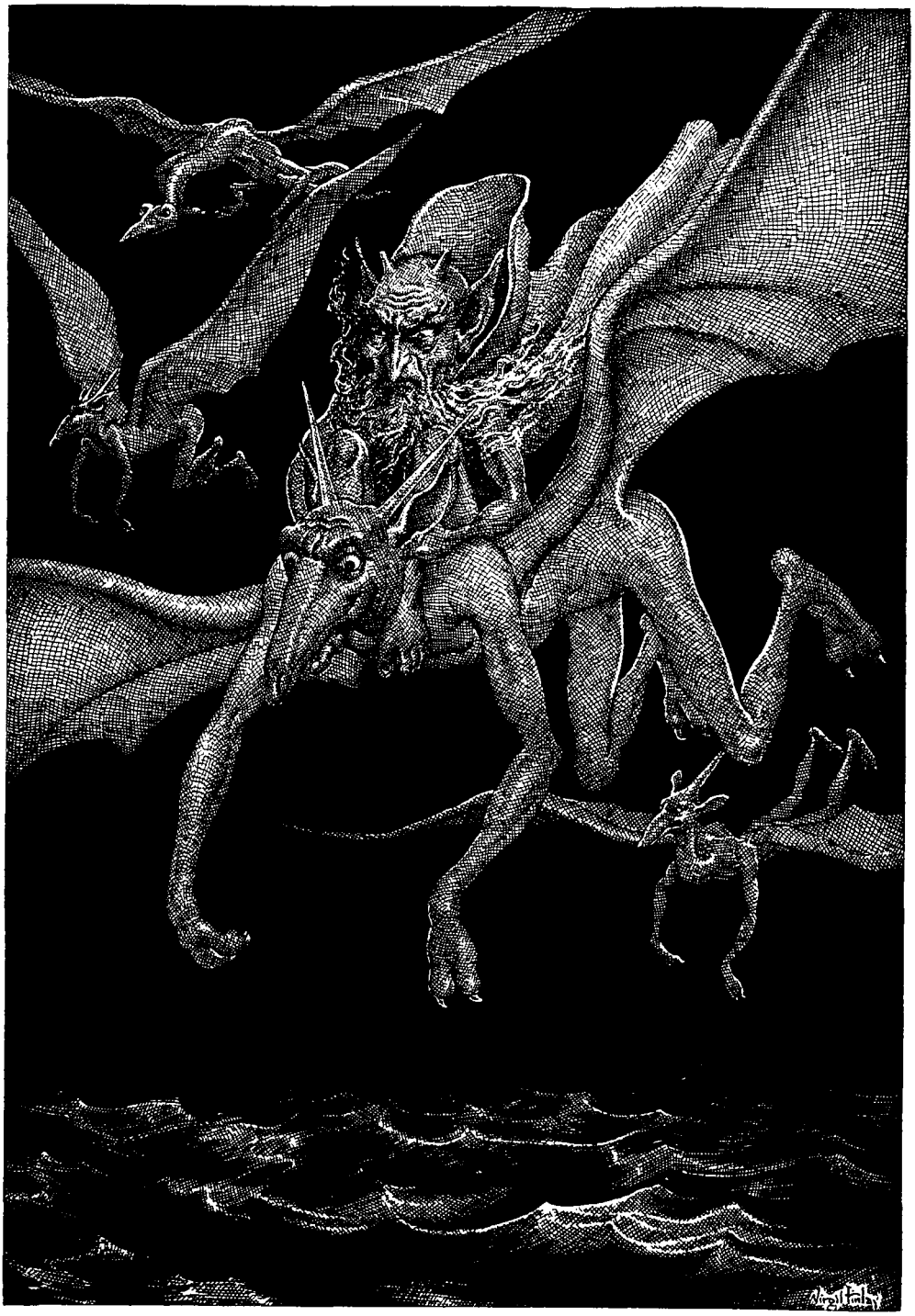

The fiend came rushing across the Atlantic, obeying as fast as he could the summons of the Rebel Soul

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way as usual. At the same time you shall be my wife and sweetheart. You are the only thing on earth that for me can have attraction; the rest are playthings. I am a spectator. In you alone I can have pure pleasure, because you are pure, innocent, have no conceit, and I can love you."

"Supposing," I bantered, "that I should cease to love you."

I said it only to tease him.

I shall never utter the thought again. No, never! The look he gave me I shall never forget. It was as if the blood had all passed from his body, his eyes were cold and hardened, a great fear filled them.

"On that day," he said, slowly, "on that day—forgive me when I say it—on that day you die. And on that day God pity the race of man! On that day I shall lose all restriction."

He was pitiless; he was cruel, as merciless as marble. I had no doubt of the omnipotence of his vengeance. I am afraid I trembled. Perhaps he perceived it. The expression flitted from his features and again he was tender. He drew me to him.

"Come, Roselle," he said, "we must not wander into questions that you do not understand. You must look upon me as a man. You must continue to love me. And I must be worthy, be great, be noble, make myself deserving of your affection.

"What you have beheld are but beginnings. I have powers that are beyond understanding, but I have you to guide them. Your love to me is worth more than all the worlds of the cosmos, and can do more good. Now let us forget it."

Which, indeed, we did. At least we did not speak of it to each other. In a few moments we drew into the station and after a brief stop were once again on our road to Russia. But for hours afterward, through all the flitting landscape, through the clatter of the train and the shouting, my mind was seething.

I had many thoughts and dreamings; I wondered. And most of all I pondered deeply, uncertainly, over what was coming.

But not even in my wildest speculation did my dreams come up to the truth. It is a way he has of always overtopping climax. I had thought that we were on a great, long honeymoon. He had told me nothing. I had no reason to think of him as a cititzen of Russia, much less as a prince.

Surprising? Not near so much so to you as it was to me. It was consternation. As I remember I was too dazed to realize what had happened. Without warning I had been lifted to the heights of dreamland. Remember, I was a girl, a democrat, and reared in the breath of Western freedom.

I only know of our driving from the depot and our arrival, after that all an iridescent maze of splendor, like the weaving of a dream, wherein I was a queen and an object of adoration. I have a recollection of what was passing, of men in braid and gold and of haughty manner, of women, splendid, beautiful, resplendent, conversing with me; of compliments and favors and comments on my beauty; of a multitude of people around about me doing politest homage, and the pride of my husband.

I could not speak a word of Russian; I could not understand it; but they accepted me.

Perhaps it was better that I was shy and timid. I knew that I was no princess, nor had enough of blood and breeding to claim the distinction. I was so overwhelmed with the revelation and its suddenness that I could do naught but fall back upon my own girl self and be natural.

Strangely enough, it caught them. They were one and all courtiers and curried favor from my husband. He was a power among them.

To my astonishment, he spoke the purest Russian. The women were his slaves and the men his servants; his words were maxims and his whims injunctions. He lived, talked, dressed in Russian. He was everything that a prince should be; even when he is born to the purple. He was natural; he was not questioned.

But I knew it was not so. When we were alone I threw my arms about his neck and asked him:

"What is it all about, George? What is its meaning? I am no princess. You know it. Neither are you a prince. Why this imposture?"

He laughed, took my bare shoulders in his hands, and kissed me.

"No princess! Why, why, little one, of course you are. You are a queen!"

I shook my head.

"No, no, George. Not that. I am a girl, your sweetheart. I love you; but I am no princess. All this splendor; all these women; beaus, counts, and others. What is it all about?"

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"Little republican!"

I nodded my head emphatically.

"I am. Yes, George, I am an American. I wish to be honest. I know you are not a prince, we are impostors. Why this name! They call you the prince of—I can't even pronounce it. And I am princess of—"

"Do not attempt it," he laughed. "You would not succeed." Then he laughed again. "You dear little rebel! The princess of something she can't even pronounce!" More laughter. "Let me advise you. Some day you and I will go out to a hill and roll down to the bottom—out of the convolution and the excitement we will evolve the title. It is the only means for you to acquire the pronunciation."

"BUT," I exclaimed, "you do not answer me! Are you a prince?"

"Of course not."

He did not deny it, did not even evade it; the answer that he gave betrayed the contempt for the part that he was playing. There was that in his intonation of a world of pleasure and of a secret delight. He led me to a divan.

"Listen," he said, "Roselle, this is one of the things of which I warned you, and there are many more in store, I utilize all circumstance for my pleasure as well as for my purpose. It is great sport playing prince.

"You know the old, old saying: 'In Rome one must be a Roman'? The princes of this land have all the good things. Wherefore I am prince. I like it and I desire that you be my princess. 'Tis the law of man that the easy spots are for those who take them."

I shook my head. "We are impostors."

It appeared merely to amuse him. "Impostors!" He repeated my words. "Roselle, you are amusing. Pray, little girl, and what are they? Can you not see it?"

"They are of the nobility!" I returned.

He broke into laughter. He had a contempt that was shattering.

"Nobility!" How he did belittle the very title! "And pray, little one, where do they get it? Because they impose themselves on the poor, blind masses. The only right they have—before the devil; they have nothing to do with God—is the ignorance of their victims.

"We are above the whole canaille. I could be Czar tomorrow. Their nobility is merely a fetish, ours is at least sincere in that we are able. 'The tools,' as Napoleon said, 'are for those who may use them.' And I am strong at wielding, Roselle."

Somehow I knew that he was right; if real inherent worth and ability were a claim to title he could be king of all. I put my thoughts into words.

"You could be king of the world!" I exclaimed.

"Do you wish it, Roselle?"

"No!"

"Nor do I. It is the destiny of man. Just the same, I am going to be some spectator. Pleasure, and the good things of all the earth! That's why in Russia I am a prince."

He was so strong and beautiful and could carry so easily the part that he was playing. I wondered.

"Are you a prince in any other country?" I asked.

There was a twinkle of merriment in his eyes; a laughter that was for all of mankind. He nodded.

"In several. I have a score of mansions. I am a top-notcher everywhere. I enjoy myself immensely. And you are my little princess."

He spoke as if I were a doll. It is a way he had always. And I would have had it so. I was not ambitious, I was happy, I lived for my husband, and I was girl enough to know that as long as I remained thus I could wield far greater power than if I tried to be his equal.

But though I loved him, I had perceived, before this, his serene disregard for laws and conventions. He was an iconoclast with a contempt for all of mankind. Although he sipped their honey and shared their pleasure he derided all their symbols. In his way he was wicked. With myself alone was he honest. I knew it.

"Don't you think," I asked, "that this is wrong? You are too great and too noble to be a mere impostor. These people still have a right."

He interrupted me. He held one finger to his forehead.

"Here is the only birthright. Ability is the right to title. There is no other. These"—he waved his hand—"are pigs! I despise them. I play with them. They eat out of my hand and like it. I am a prince!"

He laughed and almost as suddenly sobered.

"Yes," he said slowly, "and if the poor fools knew who I am, they would think me the devil."

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Well, it ended there—I continued to be the princess. For a mere girl I did splendidly. At least that is what George said. After the first novelty wore off I enjoyed it, though not, I am afraid, in the way that he did. I was sincere, whereas he was merely playing.

He jollied them along and played upon their weakness. In his tactful manner he handled them for his own amusement. He was a manager and they the actors; he shuffled them about like puppets for his pastime.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MAD MONK

BUT in a while he began to tire. We journeyed on to St. Petersburg. It was there that a little incident occurred of which I shall tell you.

We had been in the city for some days. We had taken in the operas, the places of amusement, been to the palace, and during our stay had enjoyed ourselves immensely. One day George came to me.

"Roselle, tonight we shall remain in our apartments. Or rather, you shall. I shall bring a visitor. I wish to show you off. Be alluring; be enticing; be as suggestive as you can."

"George!"

"No, no," he said, "not that. You do not understand me. What I wish is that you array yourself in all your beauty. Attire yourself in your best creation, show all the allurements of your girlhood.

"Be modest. Modesty is a million times enhancing. The man is a connoisseur."

"Who is he?"

"A slave."

"A slave?"

"Yes. My slave, and the master over all the Russians."

His slave! And the ruler of the Russians. My husband! Though I deemed him the greatest man in all the world, I could not for all that grant him this power that was so tremendous! A prince he might be; but the ruler of the Czar!

It was impossible! Besides it was impossible and incomprehensible that one such as this should come to see us. And on such a visit! I revolted.

Almost every woman is proud of her beauty and the worship it inspires, but I was a Western girl raised in the sunshine, and I cared not a whit for princes nor this sort of adoration.

"George," I said, "for once I must refuse you. If that is what it means to be a princess I wish to go back to the land from which I came. If I must be shown off like—"

But he seized me in his arms. His laughter and his tenderness told that I was mistaken. He petted away my resistance.

"Little girl," he laughed, "what do you think your husband means? Not for a million worlds and all the pleasure in the universe would I stoop to such an action.

"He is not a prince. He is an impostor. He is my slave, and sworn to obey me. I have made him and have lifted him to power and splendor. He is infamous, and a scoffer of women; I wish to teach him a lesson. I am proud of you, Roselle."

Of course I was a bundle of curiosity and perhaps I was a bit afraid, but I did as I was bid. By his manner and tenderness he had convinced me of his sincerity.

I shall never forget it. I had thrown aside my European finery, and chosen a simple gown such as I might have worn in my girlhood. I was again the girl you have known at home, romping with the children. I was the same girl that I was when George first met me. Though he might have preferred another, I have always honored, for some reason, that dress above all the others. If this man was such a judge of women I would be a girl. Perhaps I feared him.

It was over sooner than I expected. In fact, so soon that it was unexpected. The man to whom I was introduced was an individual. I recall the introduction, the strange smile of my husband—and a man.

To this day I could not tell in detail just what he looked like. I remember a robe, whiskers, and two eyes burning. He bowed. But when he raised his head his looks were gleaming luster. Though I had seen many people I had never beheld a man such as this.

There was about him all over a thin veil of fascination; velvet, fawning, silklike. He was a man of no great looks, but for all that he was wonderfully, magnetically handsome. The rush of emotions that he engendered in my breast were startling, but most of all I feared him. I loathed him. Yet for all that I would have dreaded this man's power over a woman. But that was all. What followed I did not look for.

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He started to say something, but before he had uttered one syllable George had seized him. In a blaze of anger he clutched him by the neck and shook him, tossed him about the room as though he were but a bunch of rags.

Such wrath I had never beheld in my husband. The man screamed with terror. I rushed in to stop it, but before I could do so, George had reached the doorway, dragged him to the corridor, and kicked him contemptuously down the stairway.

It was terrible. I was frightened, dumfounded, too humiliated at the brutal scene to speak.

For a moment my husband stood there, rapt as it were at the pleasure of that falling body. He smiled contemptuously as if he had done a deed that was holy. Then he turned back to me.

"George! George!" I exclaimed. "What is it? What did the man do? Surely he did nothing!"

But he turned to me. His eyes were blazing; his words even more so:

"He thought!"

"Thought?"

"Yes. You have heard of Caesar? Caesar's wife is above suspicion, I am greater than Caesar! No man upon this earth may look upon my wife with even a thought of evil!"

"But surely you did not know. How could you? His thoughts!"

He looked at me. The idea that I was but a woman, that I was far beneath him, and that I could not understand seemed to flash suddenly upon him.

"Roselle, you do not understand. Caesar was but a man. He could see but actions. I can read a man's soul and his thoughts of actions. I knew every thought the man was thinking. What occurred tonight you may never understand. But it was necessary. It was not even in the power of one with such volition as myself to stop it."

"But," I exclaimed, as I seized his arm and gazed up into his face, "he will kill you. He will kill you. He is the—monk!"

He assured me, patted my cheek into confidence.

"No, no, little one. Have no fear. He is a hound; the son of a dog. I shall destroy him. When his work is done I shall slay him before the others. His fate is settled.

"For the present there is no danger, he fears me, he is my slave. Without me he could not continue a single day, and he knows it. He is my slave, his poor magic is but the whim of my fancy. He dare not even whisper."

WAS there ever such a husband? Greater than Caesar! And even more jealous of his wife! What was I to inspire such a love in such a being? I was but a girl child from the land of the sunshine! I had no great merit but my beauty. He who might have wed the greatest princess, had chosen me from all the world of women! Is it any wonder that my heart swelled within me; that my whole body thrilled, that I threw my arms about his neck?

"Oh," I breathed, "George, my George, who, what are you?"

But just then came a clatter on the door. A voice, fearful, frightened but terribly angry, bid us open. In a moment the place was full of men. At their head was a litle man—the owner of the establishment. He was old, bald headed, and as I remember, had a great nose that twitched with anger.

He pointed at my husband.

"There he is," he said to his men. "Seize him!"

But they did not. Not a man among them stirred a foot nor muscle. They gazed one and all at me and at my husband; queerly, as if suddenly stricken with abject terror.

I, too, was afraid. Yes, and even the man before me, who almost with his last word was affected. What it was I do not know, unless it was George's bearing; he was calm almost to contempt. He was not one to bear interference. His words foretold their actions.

"Come, you fellows!" he snapped. "Get!"

I am sure that not a man of them could understand a word of English, but they needed no interpretation. They scurried, almost tumbled through the doorway. The last one turned to the one who had been their leader. The poor fellow wrung his hand in anguish, his spirit entirely withered.

"Oh," he moaned, "ruined, ruined, ruined. I am lost forever!"

And George laughed at his terror.

The man was so crushed and broken! The terrible beating that had been administered to the monk, had driven him out of his senses. The provocation was perhaps sufficient. If the monk were as powerful as it was whispered, revenge would be swift to follow. I pitied him.

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The man groveled; though he trembled I could see great danger in his eyes; he was of the kind who can take a cowardly and terrible retaliation.

"Oh," he groaned, "what have you done? The man is the most powerful in the empire. Why did you assault him? And in my establishment! You know who he is. I am ruined—you—he—"

He stopped, almost choking, his mind so full of convulsion, his emotion so poignant that the intensity of his feeling stifled utterance.

"Sit down!" said my husband. "Think!" Then: "You are afraid of this man? You really think he is the most powerful man in Russia? You dread the consequences of my action?"

"Ruined!" groaned the other.

"Listen!" said George. "Tomorrow we shall go to see him, you and I. What has happened will be known by no one. We shall see who is really the master. He shall grovel at my feet and beg for mercy. He is a mountebank and an impostor."

The man gazed at my husband. The words had been delivered in such a tone that they were convincing. Though it was incomprehensible to him that one should be so powerful, there was no doubting their effect upon him.

He gathered courage. As he did so he regained the semblance of a man of affairs and position. His words had a clear precision.

"You can do this?" he asked.

"Exactly."

"Then," he turned, "you are wonderful; I should like to see it. Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow."

The next evening the man stopped me in the foyer; he fairly bubbled with politeness. His eyes were full of joy and wonder.

"Madam," he said, "your husband is more powerful than all the Russians."

CHAPTER XXII

INTO GERMANY

THAT ended Russia. A few days later we were again on our journey westward.

I had beheld so much of my husband that I was prepared for anything. You may well think that I was frightened. But I was not. If he was something more than man, almost supernatural, he was still my husband. No man was ever such as he; no man could be so tender. Every move that he made was an adoration. So why should I fear him?

But just the same I could think, and I thought deeply.

He was clearly very powerful. What I had witnessed convinced me that he was an enemy of Russia, at least of her institutions; that he was an iconoclast who could, if he chose, shatter the greatest nations. I asked him.

"There, there," he laughed. "Now you are getting into politics."

"But," I exclaimed, "tell me! Is it not true?"

He thought a moment.

"Roselle," he said, "do you remember what the master called me?"

I shuddered.

"Oh," I said, "it was a terrible name. The Master said: You are the Rebel Soul."

For a while he was silent and gazed out of the window.

Then he spoke.

"He is right. I am. I am the Rebel Soul."

"But," I exclaimed, "what is it! You are splendid, great, wonderful, good! What is a Rebel Soul?"

"The Rebel Soul," he spoke slowly, "is a shatterer of institutions, a crusher, a destroyer, a thing of evil. He despises mankind. He is an avenger."

It was so terrible that I placed my fingers over his lips to stop him.

"No, no!" I exclaimed, "not that. I will not hear it. You are great, and good, and splendid. You are like an angel. I know that you are but talking. You do not despise mankind. Man is a splendid being."

He kissed my fingers; then he gently removed them.

"No, no, Roselle, I mean it. Man is but a worm. I despise him, I am an avenger. It is a good thing that you are with me. I hate the great and the powerful. I only attack the mighty. And it is fortunate just now that the mighty are so wicked. I have marked them for destruction.

"We are just now come from the great hotbed of oppression; I shall destroy her. The strange monk you saw is but one of my tools. He works magic; but it is the magic of a fool. What little he has accomplished has been at my inclination. He is my instrument to irritate the great eruption. I shall consume Russia."

"But," I interrupted, "you are a prince of Russia."

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He laughed.

"And so is the devil. Like Satan I am a prince wherever I sojourn. In Germany I shall be a baron. We are now approaching the land of madness. The greatest of all empires; the devil's chosen playground."

"You are a baron!"

"And a colonel of the Uhlans. Oh, yes, Roselle, I am a leader. Why should I not be? I shall lead them down to destruction. I shall watch the mighty falling. The mighty!"

The last word he spoke with a ringing contempt, the inflection in his voice that he ever had when he spoke of princes. This man who was my husband, whom I adored, had for all of his beauty, all of his magnetism, something about him that was fateful, yes, terrible.

"Lead them down to destruction. Yes," he continued, "we shall conquer all the world, enslave it and stamp it. Each man shall wear a mustache upturned at the corners. The earth will go *hoching* through the infinite to the drum-beat of the Kaiser!"

"Oh," I said, "you do not mean it. That is not the purpose of this splendid army. It is defensive. If it were not you would not assist them."

"Who said assist? I am the Rebel Soul. I assist nobody. I feed on folly, I grow fat upon destruction. It is like wine to my heart to sit in at their councils. It is *colossal;* that's what they call it. We shall all go down together."

There was a look in his eyes, prophetic, great pleasure, inspiration; he was delphic.

"Tell me," I asked, "will you—you will win, of course."

"Win, win? Why, to be sure we shall win. It shall be colossal. We will go down into the whirlwind. I shall lead them."

"Will you be a general or a king?"

"Neither. I shall be the great mind, the incarnation of the perverse to inspire them. I shall play with kings and princes; I shall use them as my pawns. It will be a cataclysm, a deluge of fire and carnage; the earth in travail; they shall ride into black oblivion."

"And you will be with them?"

"It is my nature," he returned. "I ride with the ones whom I would destroy. It is to be historic, stupendous; it is to be colossal. Beelzebub himself shall lead the fierce Assyrian."

Just then we drew into a depot. From the window I could distinguish a group of officers knotted together on the platform. They were straight, manly fellows, clean and noble, with something about them to inspire confidence and admiration.

It did not seem meet that they should go down to destruction; that they should grapple the world for the mere lust of blood and conquest.

And yet it had so been spoken. I knew by this time the fatality of my husband. I was positive that he could move whole nations. And if it were true that these men were drilling but for the crime on mankind it was proper that he destroy them.

Nevertheless, I could not but ponder.

What was he that he should be so powerful? Why was it that he should love destruction; why should he so court evil; and if he did, why was it that I loved him?

CHAPTER XXIII

A PET OF THE KAISER

AS the train threaded out of the city, I watched the children romping in the streets and alleys. They would soon be in bereavement; the slaughter that he bespoke would leave them in rags and wretched. They the little ones of the world, would suffer; they and their mothers. If my husband were so near the trouble, why could he not stop it? He was wicked.

The very thought induced a shudder; all the intense love of my spirit flashed into fierce reaction. I clenched my fists in the bitterness of my thinking. I loved him. And I had doubted!

In my heart I knew him noble. You cannot deceive a woman. Though he was this thing they called the Rebel Soul, he was great and splendid. I had my instinct.

I remember the words that has been spoken by the Master. "Be true, be faithful, do not doubt, your love will be triumphant." How often have those words cheered me. God bless the Master!

"You are a colonel of Uhlans, then?" I asked.

He laughed with a gleam of satire.

"A colonel of Uhlans. You shall see me. I play at being soldier; I am some fellow; I am the prettiest figure that ever wore brass buttons. My men adore me.

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The Kaiser says he would like to have a million like myself to march through the streets of Paris."

He chuckled.

"As if one were not enough. If the poor worm only knew!"

We arrived in Berlin in the evening.

In this great and crowded city I was not such a total stranger. For the first time in months I was in surroundings where I could understand a little of what was going on about me.

I had been fortunate when at school in being able to pick up a little German; and I had had a maid of the same tongue on whom to practise.

Now the small knowledge came in handy. I was no longer a mute in the land of Babel, but a real, live girl, who could converse and understand.

It was raining; the whole city was a sloppy drizzle; a great mass of umbrellas like shiny black mushrooms were ranged about the depot.

My husband escorted me through the building. From the very first step in the land he was the soldier—a colonel of the Uhlans, his poise was perfect; the grace that comes from training; the proud carriage that so delights a girl in a soldier.

I had never beheld so many officers; the place was crowded; as we threaded along I could not but feel that we were in the land of warriors. Many of them saluted; I felt with hot cheeks that I was a sort of curiosity; that the news of our coming had been flashed before us, and that I as the colonel's wife was creating comment.

No woman likes to be scrutinized too carefully. I felt that I was being stared at.

George escorted me carefully, solicitous that I be not jostled. A blaze of lights brightened all the place. In a confused way I received an impression of the people. I thought that I might like them.

We stepped outside. The wet spray of dampness soughed against our faces, though the rain itself could not reach us. At the moment a great, immense man stepped up and stopped suddenly before us. He wore a great cloak; his intensity, his square, hard mouth, his stature, all gave the impression of great importance. He gave an exclamation.

"Der baron! Well! Well! *Der baron!"*

George took the proffered hand; compared to which his own was like a woman's. I remember contrasting these two men; and I remember that the comparison was infinitely to the benefit of my husband.

Though he was smaller, he was better knit and fibered, every muscle laid on with the grace of a statue, counted; there was intelligence in every feature, vivacity; his blue eyes snapped action. The other was entirely different. He was an immensity, a great hulk trained to military acuteness, a Goliath attired in the raiment of a soldier; a mass slow of action, with tardy wit, but wonderful pertinacity of purpose. I could sense the driver.

But for all that he was genial; he had a wonderful way of smiling, and his blue, great eyes might be perilously indulgent to a woman.

"And this? Ah—" He looked mischievously at my husband.

"Pardon me, general. This is the baroness. General von Seiness, the Baroness von Stienhoch."

So that was my name. I recall that I flushed; that not until that moment had I known my name. I had been a princess; before that I had been a schoolgirl; what title was I next to carry? Somehow I could not rid myself of the dread and shame of being an impostor. The general's words were reassuring.

"Madam," he said, "I am delighted.

"So you are the cause of your husband's mysterious departure! He was bent on conquest. Ha, ha! With him *der tag* has come sooner than to us." Then with the air of a father: "Well, let me compliment you both. One is as wonderful as the other. You are mated. But I say, baron, is this not a little hard on our own ladies? You know the host that was waiting." He laughed.

George bit his lip. His mouth flickered with just a bit of impatience.

"Excuse me, general, but we must be going. It is damp here; our car must be waiting."

"Ah!" the other interposed. "You shall ride with us. My wife is with me. She will be delighted. You are stopping at the hotel; is it not so?"

"We have a car of our own. Thank you."

THOUGH the other was a general I noticed that my husband deferred to him not a whit. As was his custom, he had his way; there was no impoliteness whatever about it; he stated and the other accepted. In a moment we were driven through the crowded rain-soaked streets to our hotel.

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"With a spring that was superhuman he leaped into the saddle and lifted me after him. It was wild, barbaric, like the stealing of a bride at a Tatar Wedding"

It is hard to adapt oneself suddenly to a country. But by this time I was fairly accustomed to quick changes. After the suddenness with which I had become a princess in the Muscovite environment I was prepared for most anything. Though I could not rid myself of an inward shame over our false position, it was my duty to stand by my husband. Just now I was a baroness.

In the dining-room I found myself much more at ease than I had expected. These people were much the same as we were, with a great many of those manners and customs and little appurtenances of civilization that bind us together. I had been so long among strangers that even this foreign similarity was encouraging.

True, they were not as we were. The women had a propensity, especially the elder ones, of being fat, and the men a strange leaning to pomposity. I noticed the great sprinkling of uniforms and the swaggering that was conceit.

As I studied the menu I noted, from the corner of my eye, the twinkling humor with which my husband watched them.

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"You are a colonel," I admonished.

He nodded, laughing; his eyes twinkled as if I had just touched a spot of humor.

"Yes, indeed, I am a colonel. It is glorious. I am one of the Whirlwind. It shall be stupendous!"

It brought me back to the conversation on the train. He was vindictive. Whatever his object these men were to be his puppets. But he said no more.

After a while one of the prettiest women in the room stopped at our table. She was the wife of the general, the Countess von Seiness. She was splendidly beautiful; and I perceived at once that she had eyes for my husband.

I did not like her. If I wrote my feelings I would say that she looked like a pig; but I must be honest: she was splendid. What I had against her was her way of calling George "my dear," and her assumption of possession.

"My dear," she said, "don't you think that you are open for a little censure for going off like this and mating with a stranger? Excuse me"—to me—"but he had the choice of all our maidens; we looked upon him as our own possession."

Her eyes had a sheen and luster that were far too tender.

George laughed carelessly, as if he were accustomed to such prattle.

"So?" he said. "Well, I am sorry; just glance across the table. Roselle is my proof of judgment. The pick of the girls of Berlin is nothing. I had the pick of all the world."

The lady smiled, whether she would or no, as became her training.

"My!" she exclaimed to me. "How do you do it? Not all of our charms could make even a slight impression. The rascal! If you can hold his love you are fortunate."

I blushed; both at the compliment of my husband, my pride, and the words of the woman. I was a bit discomfited. Just then the general came up.

"Ach!" he beamed. "What do you think of that now? I don't blame him. If I could find a girl just half so pretty I would swim to Greenland. Baron, you are lucky; you always were a lucky dog with the women."

He was rough, but just the same I liked the general. He was not handsome, and had the soul of a great animal, but he was frank and kindly. For just the reason that I did not care for his wife I admired him.

"Yes," he said to me, "you are fortunate. You will be a favorite. You have a future. Like your husband, you will be a pet of the Kaiser."

A pet of the Kaiser! So he was so near to the seats of the mighty! Though I was ready for almost anything, I was not prepared for this. He who leaned against thrones but to topple them was at a close right hand to the Kaiser.

I recalled the satiric wickedness of his anticipation. The Whirlwind! He was sweeping whole kingdoms toward the caldron. Is it any wonder that while I watched him my whole mind dizzied with excitement and growing wonder? What was the Rebel Soul?

We parted with new-made friendship. There were to be maneuvers. I must attend with the countess. She was all elation over the éclat that my husband would display on horseback. We must go together.

As I was a stranger, and she was so amiable, I could see no way, in politeness, of refusing. Anyway, the general would brook no refusal.

"You must come, my girl," he admonished, "and witness your boy at the head of those grim devils on black horses. It is a death-troop. You must see why the Kaiser loves him."

With that they left us.

Up in our apartment I turned to my husband. I did not like this woman; I disliked her fascinations. She was shallow; and though I was become accustomed to artificiality I could not endure it in this woman. She was beautiful, and she was dangerous. What right had she to seek out my husband?

It was the first pang of jealousy that I had ever experienced. I dreaded the competition of such a creature. But George reassured me.

He took my face between his hands and laughed at me.

"You little goosy! Come, now, let me read your thoughts."

And he discovered in me, just to a dot, what I was thinking.

How did he do it? I must confess that it startled me to have him so read my thoughts and fancies.

"How do you do it?" I exclaimed. "Can you always so interpret the minds of others?"

"Always."

"And this countess?"

"I know her very soul, Roselle, as well as if I had gone through it with a search-

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light. She is but a delicate foil in the hands of Folly.

"You have nothing to fear, little one. She is artificial, insincere and foolish. Her character rests on frivolity; it is her training. She is a beautiful orchid that feeds on the atmosphere of fashion. The world is full of millions just like her—I could have had any one of them for the asking. And they would be my destruction.

"That is why I traveled so far for you. But you do not understand me."

I shook my head. He took me in his great, strong arms.

"Can't you see it, Roselle?" he whispered. "You are the only one, the only girl who can hold me. Your beauty is destiny itself; you can save all mankind. Yes, little one, and you can tame the Rebel Soul."

He startled me.

"There, there," he spoke, "you must not be frightened. I wish you to motor out to the field tomorrow with the countess. You must behold the Whirlwind."

"The Whirlwind!"

"Yes, the Whirlwind. The cyclone with which our estimable friend yonder in Potsdam expects to sweep the world."

"But," I exclaimed, "they tell me you are his pet."

He laughed. "Hardly. They do not understand. He is mine. Pet ape."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WHIRLWIND

NEXT day I beheld the Whirlwind.

It was wonderful—a spectacle that was inspiring. I had never beheld such a scene in all my life.

There were miles upon miles of soldiers stretching out in martial order to the maze of distance. The air throbbed with music; rifles glinted sunlight; flags were waving; officers clad in steel and brilliant colors rode and rerode, and dashed off with the speed of lightning.

There was something about it all that caught my heart-strings. I had ever been a worshiper of heroes. Here were a million. There was nothing like it; the straight rows stretched far out to the distance; not a crook nor waver. The line of rifles was so precise that it seemed solid. The whole thing might have been graven from a block of marble.

Motors, great powerful cars, of unnumbered horse-power, rolled out of the horizon and before the line like thunderbolts. They were full of officers, great generals, cloaked, stern, inexpressive. It was inspiring; it stirred my girlish heart to a lust for heroics.

I had come out with the countess. Our car was parked at one end of a great field, with thousands of others. I was so interested in the new spectacle that I had no ears for the babel of my companions.

My heart was out on that field with those splendid soldiers. I longed to be a man; I would be great, strong, handsome; full of the lust of conquest. They were like the Romans. And they had their Caesar!

Never until that moment had it struck me that the world is even now as it was in the times so olden. I had read Caesar when in high school, and for months had struggled even as he with the Helvetians and Nervii.

I am sure it was harder for me to struggle through the translation of his campaigns that it was for him to fight them. I cared not to read of battles. Out of it all I derived only a conception of the Romans; that they were a great, cruel, hardy people, inured to slaughter. They bathed the earth with blood, looted and bowed down nations. They did not appeal to me.

Caesar was short on adjectives. Had he not been he would have made of me a convert. I was a girl. I loved the heroic; here was a pageant. Here were the Romans. Here was the thing and the spirit that leads out to worlds to conquer. And here was Caesar!

At that moment the countess clutched me. She pointed far, far down the field into the half-seen distance. A speck, a line was coming toward us like the whirlwind.

"Look!" she shouted. "Look! Look, the Uhlans! They ride like devils! They are the pick of the German army. Your husband leads them. He is as inspiring as Satan himself when he rides before them.

"He will swerve presently, pass in review before the emperor and his staff, and then circle."

I looked, and perceived far in front of the army a group of men whom I took for the great ones. But I saw no swerving. The black line was tearing up the field straight toward us. All about me I could see men and women standing in their machines and shouting.

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My heart was bounding with excitement. I pulled out my handkerchief and waved it and joined in the clamor. It was my husband who was leading. He was a hero!

But still no swerving. The straight line drew abreast of the staff and passed it. There was not even a salutation.

Then it was that I knew that crime had been committed. I sensed it. The great throng ceased its cheering with such a suddenness that it might have been stifled. White faces were all about me: wonder, doubt and incredulity. What was it?

"Oh," I asked the countess, "what have they done?"

She, too, was white and ashen. She was grasping my arm weakly and gazing incredulously down the field.

"They did not salute the Kaiser!"

Was that all? Somehow at that moment a great surge went through me; a wave of feeling, a pride of wonderful possession. He was my husband—George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul; he was greater than the Kaiser!

At that instant the great throng burst again into cheering. Cries of "Steinhoch! The Colonel! The baron! *Hoch der Uhlans!*" filled the air. A great roar like a storm broke upon the multitude. The black line drew nearer, suddenly visualized into a great throng of plunging, frantic, magnificent, black horses.

Their riders were at ease and perfect. Each animal for all its frenzy was in exact position. The light of the sun fell on the warriors, flashing, scintillating from their trappings in a whirl of color. Magnificent, inspiring, torrential.

And at their head was my husband; he was leading the Whirlwind!

I can see him, his black, plunging stallion leaping over the ground, and his sword weaving through the air like the flame of an avenger.

He was singing. The strains of that wonderful barbaric song wafted on before him. It came to that multitude, bore it down and hushed it into silence. Though I had never heard that song, I sensed what it was. The long-lost song of Roland—the song of heroes! It was the thrill of defiance with which Charlemagne had gone to his death in the Pyrenean passes. The song of the Middle Ages. The inspiration of chivalry and heroes. The song sung by the Normans as they rode down into the plain at the battle of Hastings.

Even the horses caught its cadence, its inspiration thrilled horse and rider, and bore them on in a frenzy of wild abandon. We could see their faces, and the wild, exalted exultation of their eyes.

MY husband was directly before me. Would they never stop? They were so near that we could see the bubbles of foam on the horses; hear them breathing. It was like a gigantic, sinuous, black monster that was about to devour us.

Screams and hysteria went up from the multitude about me. They were not twenty feet away. I closed my eyes to shut out the impending debâcle. But at that instant, when he was directly upon us, George reined his stallion.

It was a miracle. The beautiful black beast dug his hoofs into the ground, then sank upon his haunches; his shapely legs apart, his nostrils distended, and his shining flanks glistening with the foam-flecks of his exertion.

On his back, riding with the ease of a centaur, was my husband. He was smiling; as fresh and beautiful as a god of morning. Behind him, rearing with exactly the same evolution as their leader, were the Uhlans. It was wonderful!

But I was not prepared for what followed. In my excitement I waved, called and held my arms out to him.

With one leap he was out of the saddle; in another he was on the running-board and reaching for me. To him I was like a baby. He picked me up in his arms and turned back to his charger. Then, with a spring that was superhuman, he leaped with me into the saddle.

Instantly the horse sprang into action. I was laughing. It was wild and barbaric, like the stealing of a bride at a Tatar wedding. I could hear great shouting; my husband was behind me, one arm held tight across my bosom, the steed racing like the west wind.

The air fanned in our faces, wildness, abandon, exhilaration. A great mass of lances flashed in the air; shouts and cries of welcome arose.

Twice he bore me up and down the line to the wildest clamor. Then we stopped in the center, facing the Uhlans. I was adopted.

But at that moment a great car raced up. A powerful, angry man descended and rushed over to us. He started to speak, but he got no farther than an ex-

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clamation. What George did I have no way of knowing, as I could not see him, but the man suddenly became submissive. My husband handed him a piece of paper saying:

"His Majesty the Kaiser."

The other saluted, faced about, entered the car, and was off like a thunderbolt.

The multitude was mute with wonder. I understood in a vague way that a breach of discipline had been committed. They could not understand it; it was incredible that one should manifest such effrontery. It was a crime that was monstrous.

I had no such fears. I knew my husband, what he was; and that he was greater than any man. I was not frightened. I was laughing. A suffusion of happiness thrilled through me, giving music to my laughter.

At the instant a great car came, turned and sped down the line of cheering Uhlans. Such a clamor was unwonted, and out of all order.

I realized what it was, and also what it was bringing. But I knew my husband. The car stopped dead before us.

Whether the horse was trained or not I have no way of telling; but at that instant he stood erect upon his hind legs. My black hair had fallen in wavy ringlets over my shoulders. With his left hand George held me safe and steady; in his right was his drawn and gleaming sabre. The magnificent stallion stepped forward, still upon his hind legs, until we could see the wondering eyes staring from the auto. I could hear my husband speaking:

"Your majesty, I have the honor of presenting my wife, the daughter of the Uhlans!"

Such was my presentation to the Kaiser.

CHAPTER XXV

THE VISITOR

AFTER such a spectacular incident it was inevitable that I be a favorite. My husband was indeed the pet of the Kaiser. Instead of reprimand he had complimented him with a flood of admiration. George's spirit was so inspiring and of that taint of the devil that it overcame royalty with the same ease that it did the common man.

I learned that he had ever so torn through all regulations. No discipline could hold him. He did just as he chose. No one could understand it.

But I could. I knew, was certain from what I had seen and learned, that he, and not the Kaiser, was the master. The emperor was absolutely overcome by his genius and understanding, and by his dashing beauty.

He was even here, in this powerful kingdom, having his way as he did with all the others. He had the emperor eating out of his hand, without the least suspicion. He was using him to his purpose.

What that was I had no way of foreseeing exactly, but I knew that the end was destruction. He had told me his ultimate intention. I soon discovered that in spite of his heroic and spectacular manner, and the favors that were heaped upon him, he had an undying hatred for the Kaiser.

And I must confess that at first I could not understand it, the pageant had so won me. I loved it: the splendor, the music, the blaze of colors, the marching soldiers. I endeavored to remonstrate.

He waved his cigarette in negation. At the time he was stretched out in a great easy-chair, reading a New York paper and smoking.

"Roselle," he said, "you do not understand it. It all looks pretty. But every one of those soldiers is a murderer dressed up. His nibs"—that is what he always called the Kaiser when we were alone—"knows it. His mind is narrow; his soul is shrunken; he dreams and pants for murder. His nightmare is colossal; he will go out and hew down nations.

"He knows no law, no man whatever, only self; he is the embodied perversity culminated from a race of robbers. His ancestors were the cutthroats of the passes. In him the thieves of his race have attained the culmination; he would loot all mankind."

"Why, George," I exclaimed, "the army of Germany is for defense; I have heard them say so."

He laughed.

"And so has the world! And the pity of it is that almost every one believes him. Some day the world will wake up to find him thundering through the gates, reeking murder. Then comes the revelation! Then go I down, riding in the whirlwind. It will be colossal!"

There was ever something about him that I could not understand. In all out-

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ward appearances, in all contacts, he was apparently a German. It was not my line of ethics.

"Then," I asked, "if you are opposed to the Kaiser, and hold him in such secret detestation, why do you inspire his friendship?"

He laughed again. His answer was characteristc.

"For the same reason, Roselle," he said, "that I would consort with the devil. To cut his horns off."

Such was his way of speaking. You may have noticed. He had no half-ways nor doubtings. His confidence was unending, absolute and certain. As I write it strikes me that his words might appear egotistical; but they never so impressed me.

There was ever something about him impressive. His words always carried conviction. He was not bragging. I knew it. And he was no impostor.

Indeed, he was not. It was only a few days after this that I had full occasion to wonder at this wonderful man that I had taken as my husband.

He was an inordinate reader. Every evening when we were free from social functions he would don a robe and go into the library, where, ensconced in an easy-chair, he would devour stacks of printed matter. He had a penchant for old and musty volumes, and unknown learning, for the wisdom of the ages, for the obscurity of thought that lurked in tomes and on dusty book-shelves.

He would gather them round about him and with a pile of raisins and a stack of peanuts pass the evening. When he was not munching he was smoking. The number of cigarettes he consumed alarmed me.

Sometimes I would steal in to him and in the silence, there beside him, read some work of fiction. At such times I did not annoy him with my chatter. I was content to sit close by him, and allow him, while he read, to run his fingers through my hair, and to pat my cheeks in fond abstraction.

Often I would sit and watch him, and admire, drinking in his beauty. I am sure no woman was ever prouder of possession. There is no exultation half so thrilling as the words "he's mine!"

I would study every feature; the swift, clear intellections of his eyes, his lips and forehead, his profile, the perfection that was classic. Every detail. I would fondle with my eyes his hair, all golden, and study out a thousand fancies in its maze of ringlets.

My mind would wander; my imagination carry me to a land of golden dreaming. Such would be an angel; such must have been Apollo, the god of manly beauty of the ancients. Who was he? What was he? Why was he above all mankind? What was this Rebel Soul?

I could not understand it. I remember once in one of my wildest fancies that the words of the Bible flashed to me: "And the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair: and they took them wives which they chose." And it startled me.

It was shortly after our talk on the Kaiser that it happened. I was to be convinced that if my husband did not in reality attain to my wildest dreams he was something very near akin to them.

IT was getting along toward winter. It was one of those evenings when the night, foreshadowed by lowering clouds, is hastened in its arrival. The air was portent, low winds, soft but moaning, picked up the clustered leaves on the lawns and tossed them into reluctant whirling eddies. There was a snappiness to the air that told of the coming winter. It was a good night to cherish a warm fireside.

George came home early. He was ever on mysterious visits, consultations with high officials, and keeping appointments with the Kaiser. He held a leverage over affairs for which there was no accounting; he was a sort of silent potential, who worked, in ways unseen, all things to his unknown purpose. While he laughed he plotted for their destruction.

I had been reading "Faust." Sometimes, in spite of myself, I compared him to Goethe's *Mephistopheles*. He was beautiful, he was great, and he was using kings for playthings. At such times my reason would run away with my fancy; and my love would have a struggle. But it would win in the end and make triumph of my adoration. He surely was not evil.

On this particular evening he came home early. We had dinner together, quietly, as was our custom, and after our usual chat he retired to the library.

I had taken up crocheting. For the greatest reason I had become engrossed in fancy work and embroidery. Most every evening, while he read I would ply

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the needle. I was enthusiastic and was happy that these things, of all others, should be fashioned by my own fingers.

But at length I began to feel lonesome, I don't know why it was. It may have been the moaning wind, or the night air and the silence.

I would step into the library and sit down beside my husband. I had an impulsive desire to have him fondle me with his fingers in my tresses. I would work and sit beside him, and watch him. When I look back now it seems strange that I should have chosen that one moment.

I arose and stepped softly across the rooms intervening. The archway that led to the library was hung with heavy portiere curtains, through which I could see the soft light streaming, shafts of mellow softness like strands of gold leading into my husband. In my fancy I had grown to love them. I would steal up, draw the curtains slightly, and gaze full minutes in upon him.

The room lives in my memory. The book-shelves reaching to the ceiling, the soft deep green of the carpet, the great table in the center, the armchairs beside it, and the statuettes of my husband's five immortals: H u g o, Shakespeare, Goethe, Descartes, and our own great Poe.

They were emblematic, embodiment of human thought; even in the cast of clay shedding the light of their peculiar genius. Hugo's ruggedness and action, Shakespeare's poetic inspiration and humanity, Goethe's imagination, and Poe's tender melancholy that was almost mystic. Upon the table beside him was the French Descartes, his favorite, symbolic, as he said, of human wisdom; the first man of the moderns to maintain that man is above mere matter.

I pulled aside the curtain and peeked in at him. He was sprawled out in his armchair, with his slippered feet crocked up before him; in his lap was an open volume; between the fingers of his right hand, hanging negligently by his chair, a burning cigarette; his left hand reached out now and then toward the table for a raisin or a peanut.

Beside him was the usual pile of books, a few others already scanned were lying open, face down, on the carpet. His back was toward me, his yellow hair rising above the chair-back. His watch was open, face down, on the table. As I looked he picked it up.

"Huh!" he muttered. "About time for his high and mighty nibs to show up for his tribute."

I started. That was the contemptuous name that he always used for the Kaiser. It could not be possible; it could not be that one who was the head of such a mighty nation, should so court even my husband. I hesitated, not knowing whether to enter or retire. Perhaps it is a good thing that I did so. What followed surprised me.

There was on the other side of the room a heavy oaken door set between two bookcases. It led into a sort of vestibule that must have been in fashion when the building was constructed. It was directly before him. He snapped his watch, laughed, and reached over for a handful of peanuts.

"Late," he muttered, "late thirty seconds! His imperial nibs of the firelands! Unusual! Let me see now, how does it go?"

He repeated something that I could not understand, a string of sounds with a sort of jerky rhythm; as far as I can distinguish from no language or reason. Then: "Come on, old fire-eater! I salute thee!"

At the same second he threw the whole handful of peanuts at the door.

I must have blinked; or it may have been that there was a blur upon my vision, or perhaps the shadow caused by the light falling slant-wise on the bookcases. I did not see the door open, and I heard no noise. At first I could not understand it. It was much like an apparition. Standing in the doorway was a man.

A man! Why do I say it? At that moment it was much more like a shadow. I had the startled, cold sensation that it had entered through the solid woodwork. It was like space suddenly molding into matter. I could scarce believe it.

But it was a man. It was human. As my perception settled and I looked closely I could so distinguish. But how human? As my reason cleared I realized that I was watching the most remarkable being I had ever beheld.

He was old. Yes, and bent and withered. His little form seemed but a wisp of shadow, almost illusive, as if some one had plucked up a bunch of darkness, dressed it and placed thereon a great growth of whiskers which was the first thing that made me think it human. That and a pair of eyes that were so

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black that a night were whiteness, and a nose that was bent and vicious. The drawn lips drooping at the corners, told of cruelty and hatred. The eyes fairly blazed with anger.

It was startling. First nothing, then this creature there before me.

Then I understood the reason for its anger. The peanuts which my husband had thrown with such wantonness and abandon were clinging to its whiskers. The white, cruel lips were twitching.

How shall I ever forget it! Those eyes! And that talon finger, reaching into its beard for a clinging peanut. He was glaring. The intensity of that glare, the hatred, the wrath and anger was like fire-brands burning. It was mute with terror.

But not so George. As the form materialized, with the shells clinging like great beads in its whiskers, he went off into a peal of laughter. It was terrible, much like one laughing into the face of the devil.

He laid his fair head back on the chair in mirthful convulsion. He laughed and laughed and laughed. Every once in a while he would rise up and point out with his finger.

"Ho, ho!" and again into a peal of laughter.

Never was there a thing so angry. It was a scene out of all reason. The little demon standing there like the personification of all evil, and the other shrieking with hilarity. At last my husband subsided. Very blandly he lit a cigarette and blew out a lusty smoke wreath. The figure did not stir.

"Well," snapped my husband.

The other did not answer. Instead he condensed his glaring; his eyes going past their blackness into a red that was fairly flaming. I had never beheld such anger. It was terrible. I hung tightly to the curtains to keep from falling. I was in mortal fear for my husband.

"Well?" he asked.

Still no answer. The little form was shaking.

"I see," George reached out carelessly with his left hand and plucked up a single peanut. It was done deliberately. He rolled it in his finger, tentatively for a moment, then with a serene nonchalance snapped it into the face of the other.

"Welcome, Beelzebub, to our little household. How is the lord of flies this evening?"

CHAPTER XXVI

"I SHALL LOVE YOU FOREVER"

THE other straightened. He appeared startled. Though his lips apparently moved not, I heard him speaking. It was sharp and sparkling, rasping like a thing that had long lain idle.

"I am not Beelzebub."

George laughed.

"And the climate over yonder. As warm as usual?"

The other glared again.

"Why be foolish!"

"You are late!"

"It takes a long time to cross the Atlantic."

Again laughter. Very deliberately George tossed another peanut. It caught in the black whiskers standing out in their blackness with fantastic color. The old man plucked it out in anger. His eyes were blinking. A sort of hesitation; a flare of hate at the affront that the other was thrusting on him, and the laughter.

"And the devil he crossed o'er the deep blue sea, and he sailed in an open boat.

"Sit down, your highness, and we'll talk it over." George tossed him a cigarette. "Have a smoke," he bantered.

I had always heard it said of my husband that he was afraid of neither man nor the devil; but I had never expected to see such a manifestation. If this was not the devil it was something very close akin. Surely no man could be of such a visage without having a soul seeped to the utmost depths of evil.

He was not like a man, but like a gnome, hideous, deformed, ungainly, some fantastic monster aroused by an incantation from the depths and unseen shadows. I had seen such forms in pictures; I had never dreamed that they might be flesh.

He sat down. The posture that he assumed magnified his littleness. Though he was seated on the extreme edge of the chair, his feet were still a perceptible distance above the carpet. He was diminutive; much like a child in the frailness of his body.

Were it not for his great, ungainly hands and the fierce, aged demoniac features, he would have passed for a mere creature. His eyes belied all that. He was proclaimed a thing of evil; in-

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"Pray, Herr Beelzebub, of whom are you speaking?" George shouted and he shook the little demon like a rat.

"Of her!" the monster shouted back. "Of her—Roselle!"

tense, consuming, striving, storming. He spurned aside the cigarette that had been tossed him.

As George turned slightly sidewise I could see the taunting flickered over his features. His blue eyes twinkled with mischievous movement.

"Don't like it, eh? Not enough brimstone?"

The little one glared still harder. His black-robed form straightened. His look was that of an imposing dignity impiously offended; of a little evil nature suddenly affronted. Hatred and impotence. The leer of the other was driving him to madness. Somehow he made me think of the dwarf demon brother of the fairy. He leaped from his chair; the heat of his anger fairly hissed.

"George Witherspoon, I command you. Obey me. You know our compact. What do you—"

But here George reached over easily, gracefully, and with mock ceremony plucked him by the collar. He sat him back on his chair.

"His majesty must be careful," he taunted. "He might stub his toe. That would be humiliating even to the devil. He might raise—"

Never had I heard such expletives. The little one's rage rendered him incoherent. He bit and fought and struggled. But George held him to the chair.

I could see who was the master. At length the old man subsided, and George sat down.

In the intervening silence I could see that the other was taking counsel with his reason. My husband lighted another cigarette, calmly, serenely contemplating, while the other cooled back into sanity.

"Well?" he asked at last.

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In the eyes of the other I could see disappointment, a sort of humiliation and yet withal of a resignation that was protesting.

"You know our compact," he whimpered.

"Exactly," came the answer. "My soul. My soul for you to play with. I to have all the beauties, desires, and pleasures of the earth; you to take what I gave you and to mold it to your fancy."

The other licked his venomous lips.

"Then you admit it. Why do you then dare insult me—to laugh at me, to taunt me, to pluck me by the collar and to thrust me back into my chair like a nincompoop? Why call me the devil?"

George smiled. He blew out a wreath of smoke with great nonchalance.

"Because it is my pleasure. I am to have anything that I wish. I am still on earth. If the devil does not wish me to pull his ears, let him stay away from my planet."

The other glared again.

"I am not the devil," he snapped.

George lifted his eyebrows.

"No?" he asked incredulously. "Well, perhaps not. Possibly I am mistaken. But you are enough like him to be his brother. And really I don't know which one is flattered."

"You are not keeping the compact."

"Ah! Now I see. That explains the purport of this visit. I have fallen down in some essential of our agreement. The devil demands that we be honorable, I see. Pray proceed."

THE little one became more agreeable. He relaxed slightly in his attitude, and perceptibly ceased his glaring. His words were softer, almost honeyed.

"You know, George, exactly. I made you. You are my creation. You are more powerful than all the world together, more splendid, and more beautiful; I have given to you all the earth and its fullness. You have power and splendor; even magic. Not a whim has been denied you. You have everything."

"Exactly," came the answer. "That's the compact. I am to have everything. And I want to say it's some compact. Suits me exactly. Where have I broken it? Proceed."

The other elevated a talon finger.

"All right. So far, so good. In all agreements it is essential that there are two parties. You have had every gratification; your wishes and desires have been scrupulously fulfilled; your aims are sensual, wordly, and self-centered. I, too, have an aim. I molded you for a purpose—for an avenger. Let me ask you how you are progressing yonder?"

He pointed with his thumb.

"You mean his nibs?" queried my husband. "His imperial princeling? Nothing could be better. I am molding all the royalty and autocracy of the earth for the grand debacle. I shall take them down into the whirlwind."

The eyes of the little one flickered with delight of madness, gloating, glimmering over coming bloodshed; he rubbed his talon hands together in chuckled anticipation.

"And then?" he asked.

George stopped.

"Ah!" The little one turned suddenly. "Ah!" he said. "I thought so. You know not what you would do. Eh? Well, allow me to enlighten you. That is the purpose of this visit. You would destroy the lords and princelings; but the others you would preserve. Have you forgotten our compact? For what, pray, were you created? Why have I labored with all my learning?

"Full well you know it! I am an avenger. I must have revenge on mankind. I shall destroy the race entirely. You are my instrument; we must work together; it is our compact."

"Indeed! And just supposing that I refuse?"

The other snapped up quickly; the words came crackling, sizzling, intensity and dreadful warning:

"I shall destroy you!"

George eyed him coldly; his lips were drawn, and his lids narrowed to slits of study.

"I see, Herr Devil. You would destroy. Let me ask you—have you ever heard of *Frankenstein?* or *Faust?"*

"Frankenstein!" exclaimed the other. *"Faust!* What have they to do with it? *Faust* sold himself to the devil. I am not the devil."

My husband laughed.

"Perhaps not. But there is an analogy that just about fits in between the two cases. You have done your work too well. I am more powerful than even the devil. I defy you. There was nothing in our compact concerning good or evil. I was to do just as I chose."

The other fell into a sort of paroxysm;

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for a moment he lost control. He waved his hand wildly; he was like a mad man, an incongruous figure that seemed all flame and anger, diabolic.

"You refuse it! You refuse! You admit that the compact is broken! You defy me! You—" For a moment his rage stifled him into mere gibbering. "Ah," he choked, "you defy me! This is to be the goal of all my learning! To be thwarted by my own creation! I shall destroy you. 'Out of the mountains shall come the waters.'

"Do you think that I was a fool? You are my creation: I took you out of the fold of the fools and threw you into the flood of the infinite. I had a purpose! I rendered you a thing of sunshine; I bestowed on you beauty, all the pleasures of the earth to gratify your senses.

"I would have revenge! Together you and I, a perfect pair, were to wreak evil upon all of mankind. How carefully have I labored! What pains have I not taken to elaborate you as a thing of evil! You had everything; you were to be a flame and a curse to all humanity.

"You defy me? This is to be the reward of all my genius. You would be good! Pooh! You would embrace their love, philosophy, and their fool religion. You are a fool! This is what comes of woman. I gave you millions of women to choose from. Yes, millions! Every one of them as beautiful as the morning: passion, sense, and wantonness—all that a man could ask for.

"And you play the idiot. You travel thousands of miles to choose just the one woman in all the world who would destroy you! Because you have a silly little fluttering under your breast you call it love, and proceed forthwith to do good unto mankind. Blasphemer! She will destroy you. She will make my work as nothing!"

It was terrible. Never was there such invective, such rage and clamor. In his anger he had climbed up on his chair, and from this eminence was hurling his anathemas.

GEORGE had risen; his features were steel-cut and rigid. With icy command he regarded the other who thus rained his wrath upon him. During it all he moved not a single eyelash; he was cool with contempt, his lips curling scorn, a picture of supremest loathing. When the other had subsided for lack of breath, he spoke.

"Sit down, Herr Devil. You are excited. I would enlighten you on a few points of your infinity that even your unfathomed learning has passed by unnoticed. You have called me a fool! And you claim me as your own creation. Perhaps I am. Certainly I am what you made me. I do not deny it.

"But you have made too well. I am not your slave; perhaps I am your master. At least I am your equal, and I do not fear you. And it may be that I am just *Frankenstein* monster enough to consume you.

"We made our compact. You know it. For a consideration I was to have all the pleasures of the earth and its fulness. I was to have beauty, wealth, and genius. Not a whit nor farthing of all the world's great bounty was to be denied me.

"There was not one thing excepted. Do you follow?—not one thing excepted. I was to have everything.

"Now, then, who is the fool? I, who made such a compact, or you, who trusted that you could drive me always into the ways of evil? I was to have everything. I tasted of the earth and all its fulness, and had no satisfaction.

"I followed the path where you directed, and I found it dreary; it was sensuous and full of action, its lights were brilliant, and I found it cloying. I, who had everything, still had nothing. The humblest peasant, in the ways of happiness, was my lord and master. I did not like it.

"What was it? I looked about me. And I soon discovered. It was the very thing that you, like all the wise men, have always scorned as folly. Your contempt betrays your ignorance, and that ignorance proves that you are the fool. With all your learning, you have overlooked the one thing that outweighs all others—love! And the love of a noble woman!

"I was to receive everything I wished. I, too, would possess this happiness that would have no cloying: I, who had had all beauty, sensuous, wanton, destroying, would know the love of a pure woman. I was to have everything. Was this one thing which outweighed all others to be denied me? Was I to be refused the one thing that makes life worth the living?

"It is the fulness of the earth and its blessing; its life is light. If it has driven me into rectitude and honor, it is my business. Our compact is specific: 'the

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fulness of earth thereof.' I am taking the fulness."

But his words were wasted. I could see in those hateful black eyes that there was no relenting, no compromise nor concession; they glared with baleful perverseness. He was dreadful, unnatural, sitting there in his hatred; his talon hands clenched and reclenched into fists that were like knots of cording. He broke again into a fury.

"You defy me. I shall destroy you. I am the master. You shall not have her!"

George straightened. I had never seen him look so perfect. How wonderful was his clear-cut beauty against the hideousness that was before him.

"Pray, Herr Beelzebub, of whom are you speaking?"

The answer came like a bombshell.

"Of her!" the demon shouted. "Of her! Her! Her! Roselle!"

A haze fell over me. Throughout it all I had been so frightened that I scarce could stand. The truth flashed to me. This thing was come between myself and my husband.

I felt cold and sickly; my knees trembled. I have a blurred recollection of a struggle there in the library; of George shaking something like a rat, of terrible oaths and blasphemous execrations.

That is all that I remember. When I came to I was in my own room, and in the arms of my husband. He was stroking gently the hair away from my forehead.

How blue his eyes were! And his smile! He was a thousand times more beautiful than I had ever seen him.

"Oh," I murmured, "George, my George! You will love me? You will not leave me? You will love me always?"

He kissed me. His strong arms pressed me to him.

"Roselle," he whispered, "I love you. Not all the fiends in hell shall ever part us. I shall love you forever."

CHAPTER XXVII

AWAY FROM THE LAND OF SHADOWS

AFTER such an incident it was inevitable that the place should be disagreeable. From that night on I had an awe and dread for life in such a country. No longer had I a taste for *Faust* or tales of German goblins. They had come too close for comfort.

The whole land, the very empire, was, to my heated mind, symbolic of unknown portents; the trim houses, the quaint rustics, the picturesque beauty of the roadways, were ever hinting, somehow, of some coherence or supplement of the Land of Shadows.

It was illusive. But it was there, permeating every cloud and shadow, the sentiency that all life was, as it were, pulsing with double import.

Even the men—the queer creatures of the street, grotesque in their costumes, with their big stomachs, their pipes, their flat woolen caps and baggy trousers—contributed to color. What before had delighted me as quaint and homelike wore now but the hue of goblins. It was all unreal, all setting, like the unsettled processional flittings that one knows in a dream.

Not even the soldiers, with all their pomp and color, their bands and tossing banners, could enthuse me. The balls, with all their music, their blaze of lights and laughter, were not natural. It was all lurking portent.

George saw it.

I had never said anything to him about his strange companion. Outside of my appeal that he should not leave me, I had never spoken of my apprehension. It had been too sudden. And I felt guilty.

I had been watching where I had not been wanted. I had been an eavesdropper who had heard what had not been pleasing.

My thoughts were shuffled and I could get no sequence. My fears cluttered my mind.

Just the same, I could think. I had this strange being for my husband; a man who was not a man, and yet, for all that was of the physique of an Apollo. He had not a single blemish; he was beautiful; he had life and pride and passion—he had a love that was consuming, and that enveloping personality that is ever so dear to a woman. And he had genius.

There was ever something about him that was like a flame in the passing. Something far-reaching; that flashed and flicked and fluttered—and consumed.

I had seen him perform magic.

His status in the world was unreal and impossible. He was a prince, and he was a baron. He was a Russian, he was a German, and I know that, first of all, he

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was an American. I had heard him called the King of Thieves. What was he?

I had read "Faust" and "Frankenstein." He had classified himself as being between the two. But in what manner? Who was the goblin that was his strange companion? The legend of *Faust* has it that he sold himself to the devil. *Frankenstein's* monster was a creation who consumed his master. Wherein could come the analogy of my husband? Who was this little man all sin and hatred?

Was he the devil? At first, in my fear and horror, I had inclined to the superstition. But that was against my training. I had been taught from childhood to disbelieve in the foolish and the supernatural. But because I could not understand it was no reason for my falling down into a faith in fantoms. He was horrid. He was sin and evil. And he had a compact with my husband!

I had heard it. He had used his soul as a plaything. And what human thing could have use for the soul of another? He had wrought him out of a mere man into a being. This thing of darkness had flushed into man a spirit that was all brightness. He had done his work too well. The creation, by the words and actions of my husband, was even more powerful than its maker.

George had revolted. I was glad. He had forsworn the ways of evil. The compact for the fall of mankind had been broken. The love for my own little self, so frail and insecure, had shattered all the dreams of this lurking monster.

Such a little thing as love! To be such an inspiration! To snap such a mighty spirit out of destruction; to rule and conquer, to sit enthroned in the heart of this one who knew no master! I was not worthy.

It brought me back once more the words of our good old Master. "Love, Roselle," he had told me. "You are right. Never waver. Your love will conquer."

And it made me strong. My love would be an inspiration. I would move worlds. No, no, no, I would never falter! For my loved one, this wonderful one who was mortal and yet of the gods, I would be a light and a sacrifice.

There was a struggle coming. The revolting spirit gone to the hosts of righteous would come into contact with this thing of evil. It was my little body that had done it. We would go bravely into the battle together, and we would conquer. In my soul I knew it.

But I said not a word to my husband.

Why should I? He knew, if he wished to, just what I was thinking. And if he could read my thoughts, he could know my heart as well. If love was the thing to save him, the intensity of my passion and devotion would lift him to heights of honor and aspiration. If I was to play a part in the subtle drama, it would be that of a noble woman. Love demanded; I obeyed. It was not impulse nor conceit, but the pure white love that lies in the heart of every woman.

AT TIMES the whole affair became immense and fearful. George had the beauty of an angel. He had intuition, strength, vigor, inspiration. He was dazzling. He could penetrate straight through to any depth of thinkng. He attained always his way and purpose. There was no standing against his magnetism.

Often I watched him. The light that was in his eyes, the flickers of feelings that traced over his features, his attitude, his gestures. In all of them he was perfect. I have studied him as he sat beside me in the lamplight; my work lying idle and my mind wandering far in fancy. The nearest I can come to description is a painting I had seen in my girlhood. I think it was called "Genius"—of a being half god and all beauty sitting in contemplation. And I was his wife.

As I have said, the country had grown depressing. George saw it.

"Little one," he said, "you are homesick."

I nodded. I put my hands upon his shoulders. He patted my cheeks, as he had a way of doing; he pinched them playfully, and held my face up toward his own.

"Don't like this bad place?"

"Oh," I said, "George, I don't like it. It has something foreboding about it. It is depressing. I am afraid. I don't like evil, and I fear darkness. Everything here seems charged and static, almost to explosion. I have a dreadful uncanny feeling that something terrible will happen. I wish to leave it."

"Don't even like the pretty soldiers?" he bantered.

"No, I don't. When I first saw them I thought them splendid. But now I understand them. They are trained to kill. They are worse than butchers. They would kill men and dishonor women. They are unnecessary. They are nice to

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look at, but, after all, they are just as you say—merely murderers dressed up."

He kissed me.

"Right you are, little one; right you are. I was sure that you would see it. You have more wisdom than all the kings of Europe. We shall leave this country. It is the land of madness. It is the old adage coming to fulfilment—'Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.' They shall go down into the whirlwind."

An impulse flushed upon me.

"George," I asked, "is it true—is it real—are you to lead them?"

For the first time since I had known him I saw indecision. A shade passed over his features; his eyes wavered; he removed one hand from my cheek and pressed it to his forehead.

"I don't know," he said; "I don't know. I do not think so."

With a woman's instinct, I understood. I pressed the point to advantage.

"Oh," I said, "say it! Promise that you will not lead them. You will not ride with this awful Whirlwind. It is murder; it is man's destruction. You must be his salvation. You must save him."

He looked at me. He did not answer to the point.

"Woman was man's first downfall; but even so, she shall be his regeneration," he said.

"Roselle," he said, "I cannot refuse you. You are pure and noble; you are unselfish. We love together. And so long as we do your whim is my injunction."

"I am glad, George!" I exclaimed. "Oh, so glad!" And I threw my arms about him.

"Where would you go, little one?"

"Oh," I said, "anywhere. To the land of sunshine, to the land of roses and laughing children. Where I can be happy."

He laughed.

"Very well, it shall be as you wish. To a land of fairies, and you shall be its princess."

CHAPTER XXVIII

"THE MASTER—OUR MASTER"

THAT is how it came about. But we are here. In the land of France.

Here in this country of teeming millions we have a spot secluded. It is sunshine. A castle or château stands by a lake of crystal. The lawns stretch out to the limpid surface. Roses bloom beside the driveways.

The air is scented with the living springtime. Swans and fowl glide upon the water. The trees throng with the birds, full-throated with the song of mating. And children! Their merry laughter outmelodies and outsilvers the happiness of the robins. It is indeed like the land of fairies. Such a place as the poet sang of:

> In Xanadu did Kublai Khan
> A stately pleasure dome decree;
> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran,
> Through caverns measureless to man,
> Down to a sunless sea.

It was like George to select the one place in all the world where beauty and peace were so intensified as to be a positive witchery. The poet expressed the beauty in words, but George expressed it in our home. It was the intensity of his nature to heap in this one spot all the concentrated beauty of his genius. I had asked it. And he had responded to the overflowing.

While I write I can feel the magic of his inspiration. It is an exultation, a happiness that could be forever. It is he that does it. His love is like that of an angel, supersensual, irresistible, enveloping. I have the riches of the earth, its beauty, its profusion, the love-songs of the birds, the perfumed iridescence of the flowers and fruitings. I am the wife of the Rebel Soul awakened.

In Berlin I had become depressed and languid. But here in the contrast, in the sunshine, I was like the butterfly. Why should I not be, with everything at my fingers' ends—life, love, and beauty? I speedily forgot my forebodings.

It was as George had promised—the garden of the fairies; a Xanadu in real life, an idyll.

And yet I must stop and think. Everything in our life has been abnormal; even our happiness. I am not like other girls. I am part of—I know not what. Sometimes I ponder. I have strange intuitions. I am not even myself.

The old Roselle that was in her girlhood is now no more. In spite of my happiness, I can sense that I, too, have a soul in conflict. The reason:

You know it—it is my excuse why I have not written. It has been years since I left you. Had I forgotten? Was I careless? You have waited these long, long months for a letter.

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I cannot tell you.

It is the one part that I cannot account for. Though I could remember all of my former life, your faces had been somehow washed from my memory. Why was it?

What is it all about? We are different, like no one else on earth. Does George understand it; and if he does, why do I not ask him? He has never refused me a single whim, nor to answer a question. Why, then—

I answer that I cannot.

It is his secret. At times when I think of it, I have a horror and a premonition. It would be dissolution. It holds me back like an iron hand out of the shadows. It is a borderland that I dare not enter.

He is mine, godlike and splendid. And I have his love. He is kind and tender. I would not mar him. I would have him so forever.

Love? It is such a little weapon. And yet how powerful! He, the great iconoclast, the scorner of all customs, bows to my slightest whim and pleasure. It is wonderful. Such filmy strands to bind such a splendid creature! It is his confession. My love; everything.

What to mere man might be the pastimes of idle moments are to him more potent than the forces that hold the worlds together. It is as the good old Master said: "Love, love, Roselle; it is your weapon."

Which brings me back.

I had forgotten you; you had been effaced from my memory; you had been blotted out as if you had no existence. And I all the time have been in dreamland. Why have I so suddenly awakened? I will tell you: I have seen the Master!

It was on one of our periodical trips to the capital. George is essentially kinetic in his nature; there is nothing static about him; he must have action; forever he is in conflict. For the versatility of the French he holds a keen appreciation. He was ever on long trips, and undertaking I know not what adventures. He cannot be still; he is, above all things, dramatic.

Very often he has insisted that I be his companion. What tales I might tell!

Once, I remember, he sang at the opera. It just goes to show how far reaching is the versatility of his genius. He had maintained that the art of singing was in its infancy. A manager had scoffed. Out of their contention came his one night on the stage.

There was no singing that could compare; he had not only voice and technique, but the wonderful personality of a great musician. That one night would have proved to me what he was, even if I had not known him. The insistent manager would have had him sign for a thousand nights. But George laughed.

"It is nothing, Roselle. Any man might do it. Every man should control his own body; he should be his own master."

His friends were legion; of every rank and stratum of society. At times he would make long journeys. And whenever he did he was certain to return loaded with gems and treasure. The accumulations that he has heaped about me might endow a princess.

I shall not dazzle you with the description. If I had heard strange stories of George Witherspoon in my girlhood, they were only a thousandth part of the fact. The Prince of Mystery!

Now comes the inexplicable.

You remember the dear old Master. Let me ask you—what has the Master to do with my husband? He was at the house, if you recall, on the night when I first met George. And the struggle in the ballroom. You remember? It was the Master who gave me warning and imparted to me those injunctions that have been, ever since, words of gold and sunshine.

But let me tell you how it came about that I so suddenly recollected you. It is strange. As if a curtain had been lifted.

IT WAS only a few short days ago. We motored up to the capital. It was to be one of our outings of pleasure and excitement. It was a splendid day. George had dispensed with the chauffeur, and was doing his own driving.

When we are on a real excursion he tosses me into the machine much as if I were a doll, and climbs in beside me. There is always excitement. He is a driver; he loves to cut the wind.

He knows of splendid vistas, avenues, rows of trees, leafy tunneled archways, orchards, vineyards, highways, rivers winding down beside us, and towns cut out of the middle ages. He is ever selecting some route that is delightful.

It was evening when we drove through the suburbs. One of those evenings in the early summer when the air is as mellow and as tender as the fresh green leaves that have just tipped the trees with their verdure.

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Suddenly George twisted the steering wheel.

"We will take a by-path where there is not so much traffic," he said.

We passed into a street that was long and narrow; the houses were built almost up to the curb; they were old, and, what with their grimness and proximity and their scaly, dirty paint, were sinister and forbidding.

I leaned back. I enjoyed these quick transitions; it is one of the delights of European cities. George put the car into high speed, and we shot out like a thunderbolt. But it was almost disaster.

It was like a flash! A black form emerged from the doorway. The speed of the car was magnetic; the form wavered and faltered in erratic hesitation I caught my breath at the looming tragedy.

But George swerved, the car turned sidewise, skidded, and he averted death by a hairbreadth. As we swooped past the figure I could have touched it. And I recognized—the Master!

I must have cried aloud. I don't remember just what I did in the sudden gasp of my surprise. It was like suddenly beholding a form out of another world.

I looked back, but the figure had disappeared. When I turned again, I was gazing into the eyes of my husband. He gave me a knowing look.

"Did you recognize anybody?" he asked.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "George, it was the Master, the good, old Master. Do let us go back and find him."

He was obedient to my wishes. The car was straightway turned about, and we returned up the street, searching closely. He must have stepped hastily across the street and entered another building. We made inquiries, but the people about plainly could not understand us. They had seen no such person. I was disappointed.

Finally my husband again turned the car toward the city. But he patted my hand gently.

"Do you wish to see the Master as bad as that, little one?" he asked.

"Oh," I exclaimed again; "the Master! Just think who it is! All the way over here in France. How can we find him?"

"That is easy, Roselle. You have wished it. He shall be at the hotel tonight."

"At the hotel?"

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"To-night."

"Oh!" The car was now speeding along. "You say it, George, just as if you had willed it. How do you do it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Rebel Soul, little one," he answered; "Rebel Soul. They must obey me."

The same old question. Just the same, I was glad to know I was to see the Master.

At the hotel I changed my costume. As it happened, I had with me, just by chance, a simple dress such as I had worn at home. I eagerly decided to wear it. I would be the same little girl to the Master.

I was all expectant.

DOWN in the dining-room, I watched and studied every figure. George laughed and bantered; he took a mischievous pleasure in my eagerness. I was like a little child that has been promised a new plaything—I could not wait.

I knew that he had always loved my husband. George had been his star pupil; a great genius that had burst beyond control. From the very beginning he had been stalwart in his faith; he had never faltered. His love was a magnified admiraton; something higher and beyond the love of woman.

Toward the end of the meal George ceased his chatter. He suddenly became serious.

"So you are this anxious to see the Master? Really, I believe you love him."

I nodded.

"I do, George; I always did. The Master—"

He watched me with strange intent; his blue eyes filmed with understanding.

"The Master," he repeated my words.

"The Master," then, after a pause: "Our Master."

There was something pregnant in the words, and the way he spoke them. If there was anybody in the world for whom he had respect, I knew it was for our old friend of wisdom. His next words embodied my own thoughts.

"Let us go, Roselle," he said. "I, too, would see the Master. He is coming this evening; but before he comes there is something I must tell you."

(To Be Continued Next Month)

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An Immortal Fantasy

The Demoiselle d'Ys

By Robert W. Chambers

I

THE utter desolation of the scene began to have its effect; I sat down to face the situation and, if possible, recall to mind some landmark which might aid me in extricating myself from my present position. If I could only find the ocean again, all would be clear, for I knew one could see the island of Groix from the cliffs.

I laid down my gun, and, kneeling behind a rock, lighted a pipe. Then I looked at my watch. It was nearly four o'clock. I might have wandered far from Kerselec since daybreak.

Standing the day before on the cliffs below Kerselec with Goulven, looking out over the sombre moors among which I had now lost my way, these downs had appeared to me level as a meadow, stretching to the horizon, and, although I knew how deceptive is distance, I could not realize that what, from Kerselec,

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seemed to be mere grassy hollows, with great valleys covered with gorse and heather, and what looked like scattered bowlders were, in reality, enormous cliffs of granite.

"It's a bad place for a stranger," old Goulven had said; "you'd better take a guide"; and I had replied, "I shall not lose myself." Now I knew that I had lost myself, as I sat there smoking, with the sea-wind blowing in my face. On every side stretched the moorland, covered with flowering gorse and heath and granite bowlders. There was not a tree in sight, much less a house.

After a while I picked up the gun, and, turning my back on the sun, tramped on again.

There was little use in following any of the brawling streams which every now and then crossed my path, for, instead of flowing into the sea, they ran inland to reedy pools from which the snipe rose, peeping, and wheeled away in an ecstasy of fright. I began to feel fatigued, and the gun galled my shoulder in spite of the double pads. The sun sank lower and lower, shining level across yellow gorse and the moorland pools.

AS I walked, my own gigantic shadow led me on, seeming to lengthen at every step. The gorse scraped against my leggings, crackled beneath my feet, showering the brown earth with blossoms, and the brake bowed and billowed along my path. From tufts of heath rabbits scurried away through the bracken, and among the swamp grass I heard the wild duck's drowsy quack. Once a fox stole across my path, and again, as I stooped to drink at a hurrying rill, a heron flapped heavily from the reeds beside me. I turned to look at the sun. It seemed to touch the edges of the plain. When at last I decided that it was useless to go on, and that I must make up my mind to spend at least one night on the moors, I threw myself down thoroughly fagged out. The evening sunlight slanted warm across my body, but the sea-winds began to rise, and I felt a chill strike through me from my wet shooting-boots. High overhead gulls were wheeling and tossing like bits of white paper; from some distant marsh a solitary curlew called. Little by little the sun sank into the plain, and the zenith flushed with the after-glow. I watched the sky change from palest gold to pink, and then to smouldering fire. Clouds of midges danced above me, and high in the calm air a bat dipped and soared. My eyelids began to droop. Then, as I shook off the drowsiness, a sudden crash among the bracken roused me. I raised my eyes. A great bird hung quivering in the air above my face. For an instant I stared, incapable of motion; then something leaped past me in the ferns, and the bird rose, wheeled, and pitched headlong into the brake.

I was on my feet in an instant peering through the gorse. There came the sound of a struggle from a bunch of heather close by, and then all was quiet. I stepped forward, my gun poised, but when I came to the heather the gun fell under my arm again, and I stood motionless in silent astonishment. A dead hare lay on the ground, and on the hare stood a magnificent falcon, one talon buried in the creature's neck, the other planted firmly on its limp flank. But what astonished me was not the mere sight of a falcon sitting upon its prey. I had seen that more than once. It was that the falcon was fitted with a sort of leash about both talons, and from the leash hung a round bit of metal like a sleigh-bell. The bird turned its fierce yellow eyes on me, and then stooped and struck its curved beak into the quarry. At the same instant hurried steps sounded among the heather, and a girl sprang into the covert in front. Without a glance at me she walked up to the falcon, and, passing her gloved hand under its breast, raised it from the quarry. Then she deftly slipped a small hood over the bird's head, and, holding it out on her gauntlet, stooped and picked up the hare.

She passed a cord about the animal's legs and fastened the end of the thong to her girdle. Then she started to retrace her steps through the covert. As she passed me I raised my cap and she acknowledged my presence with a scarcely perceptible inclination. I had been so astonished, so lost in admiration of the scene before my eyes, that it had not occurred to me that here was my salvation. But as she moved away I recollected that unless I wanted to sleep on a windy moor that night I had better recover my speech without delay. At my first word she hesitated, and as I stepped before her I thought a look of fear came into her beautiful eyes; but as I humbly explained my unpleasant plight her face flushed and she looked at me in wonder.

"Surely you did not come from Kerselec!" she repeated.

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Her sweet voice had not trace of the Breton accent, nor of any accent which I knew, and yet there was something in it I seemed to have heard before, something quaint and indefinable, like the theme of an old song.

I explained that I was an American, unacquainted with Finistère, shooting there for my own amusement.

"An American," she repeated, in the same quaint, musical tones. "I have never before seen an American."

For a moment she stood silent, then, looking at me, she said: "If you should walk all night you could not reach Kerselec now, even if you had a guide."

This was pleasant news.

"But," I began, "if I could only find a peasant's hut, where I might get something to eat, and shelter."

The falcon on her wrist fluttered and shook its head. The girl smoothed its glossy back and glanced at me.

"Look around," she said, gently. "Can you see the end of these moors? Look north, south, east, west. Can you see anything but moorland and bracken?"

"No," I said.

"The moor is wild and desolate. It is easy to enter, but sometimes they who enter never leave it. There are no peasants' huts here."

"Well," I said, "if you will tell me in which direction Kerselec lies, to-morrow it will take me no longer to go back than it has to come."

She looked at me again with an expression almost like pity.

"Ah," she said, "to come is easy and takes hours; to go is different—and may take centuries."

I STARED at her in amazement, but decided that I had misunderstood her. Then, before I had time to speak, she drew a whistle from her belt and sounded it.

"Sit down and rest," she said to me; "you have come a long distance and are tired."

She gathered up her pleated skirts, and, motioning me to follow, picked her dainty way through the gorse to a flat rock among the ferns.

"They will be here directly," she said, and, taking a seat at one end of the rock, invited me to sit down on the other edge. The after-glow was beginning to fade in the sky and a single star twinkled faintly through the rosy haze. A long, wavering triangle of waterfront drifted southward over our heads, and from the swamps around plover were calling.

"They are very beautiful—these moors," she said, quietly.

"Beautiful, but cruel to strangers," I answered.

"Beautiful and cruel," she repeated, dreamily—"beautiful and cruel."

"Like a woman," I said, stupidly.

"Oh," she cried, with a little catch in her breath, and looked at me. Her dark eyes met mine, and I thought she seemed angry or frightened.

"Like a woman," she repeated, under her breath; "how cruel to say so!" Then, after a pause, as though speaking aloud to herself, "How cruel for him to say that."

I don't know what sort of an apology I offered for my inane, though harmless, speech, but I know that she seemed so troubled about it that I began to think I had said something very dreadful without knowing it, and remembered with horror the pitfalls and snares which the French language sets for foreigners. While I was trying to imagine what I might have said, a sound of voices came across the moor, and the girl rose to her feet.

"No," she said, with a trace of a smile on her pale face, "I will not accept your apologies, monsieur; but I must prove you wrong, and that shall be my revenge. Look. Here come Hastur and Raoul."

Two men loomed up in the twilight. One had a sack across his shoulders and the other carried a hoop before him as a waiter carries a tray. The hoop was fastened with straps to his shoulders, and around the edge of the circlet sat three hooded falcons fitted with tinkling bells. The girl stepped up to the falconer, and with a quick turn of her wrist transferred her falcon to the hoop, where it quickly sidled off and nestled among its mates, who shook their hooded heads and ruffled

"There be three things which are too wonderful for me—yea, four which I know not:
"The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."

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their feathers till the belled jesses tinkled again. The other man stepped forward and, bowing respectfully took up the hare and dropped it into the game-sack.

"These are my *piqueurs*," said the girl, turning to me with a gentle dignity. "Raoul is a good *fauconnier* and I shall some day make him *grand veneur*. Hastur is incomparable."

The two silent men saluted me respectfully.

"Did I not tell you, monsieur, that I should prove you wrong?" she continued. "This, then, is my revenge, that you do me the courtesy of accepting food and shelter at my own house."

Before I could answer she spoke to the falconers, who started instantly across the heath, and with a gracious gesture to me she followed. I don't know whether I made her understand how profoundly grateful I felt, but she seemed pleased to listen as we walked over the dewy heather.

"Are you not very tired?" she asked.

I had clean forgotten my fatigue in her presence, and I told her so.

"Don't you think your gallantry is a little old-fashioned?" she said; and when I looked confused and humbled, she added, quietly, "Oh, I like it; I like everything old-fashioned, and it is delightful to hear you say such pretty things."

The moorland around us was very still now under its ghostly sheet of mist. The plover had ceased their calling; the crickets and all the little creatures of the fields were silent as we passed, yet it seemed to me as if I could hear them beginning again far behind us. Well in advance the two tall falconers strode across the heather, and the faint jingling of the hawks' bells came to our ears in distant, murmuring chimes.

Suddenly a splendid hound dashed out of the mist in front, followed by another and another, until half a dozen or more were bounding and leaping around the girl beside me. She caressed and quieted them with her gloved hand, speaking to them in quaint terms which I remembered to have seen in old French manuscripts.

Then the falcons on the circlet borne by the falconer ahead began to beat their wings and scream, and from somewhere out of sight the notes of a hunting-horn floated across the moor. The hounds sprang away before us and vanished in the twilight, the falcons flapped and squealed upon their perch, and the girl, taking up the song of the horn, began to hum. Clear and mellow her voice sounded in the night air:

"Chasseur, chasseur, chassez encore,
Quittez Rosette et Jeanneton,
Tonton, tonton, tontaine. tonton,
Ou, pour rabettre des l'aurore,
Que les Amours soient de planton,
Tonton, tontaine, tonton."

As I listened to her lovely voice, a gray mass which rapidly grew more distinct loomed up in front, and the horn rang out joyously through the tumult of the hounds and falcons. A torch glimmered at a gate, a light streamed through an opening door, and we stepped upon a wooden bridge which trembled under our feet, and rose creaking and straining behind us as we passed over the moat and into a small stone court, walled on every side. From an open doorway a man came, and, bending in salutation, presented a cup to the girl beside me. She took the cup and touched it with her lips, then lowering it, turned to me and said, in a low voice, "I bid you welcome."

At that moment one of the falconers came with another cup, but before handing it to me presented it to the girl, who tasted it. The falconer made a gesture to receive it, but she hesitated a moment, and then, stepping forward, offered me the cup with her own hands. I felt this to be an act of extraordinary graciousness, but hardly knew what was expected of me, and did not raise it to my lips at once. The girl flushed crimson. I saw that I must act quickly.

"Mademoiselle," I faltered, "a stranger whom you have saved from dangers he may never realize, empties this cup to the gentlest and loveliest hostess of France."

"In His name," she murmured, crossing herself as I drained the cup. Then, stepping into the doorway, she turned to me with a pretty gesture, and taking my hand in hers led me into the house, saying again and again: "You are very welcome—indeed, you are welcome to the Château d'Ys."

II.

I AWOKE next morning with the music of the horn in my ears, and, leaping out of the ancient bed, went to a curtained window where the sunlight filtered through little, deep-set panes. The horn ceased as I looked into the court below.

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A man who might have been brother to the two falconers of the night before stood in the midst of a pack of hounds. A curved horn was strapped over his back and in his hand he held a long-lashed whip. The dogs whined and yelped, dancing around him in anticipation; there was the stamp of horses, too, in the walled yard.

"Mount!" cried a voice in Breton, and with a clatter of hoofs the two falconers, with falcons upon their wrists, rode into the court-yard among the hounds. Then I heard another voice which sent the blood throbbing through my heart: "Piriou Louis, hunt the hounds well, and spare neither spur nor whip. Thou, Raoul, and thou, Gaston, see that the *épervier* does not prove himself *niais*, and if it be best in your judgment, *faites courtoisie à l'oiseau. Jardiner un oiseau* like the *mué* there on Hastur's wrist is not difficult but thou, Raoul, mayest not find it so simple to govern that *hagard*. Twice last week he foamed *au vif* and lost the *beccade*, although he is used to the *leurre*. The bird acts like a stupid *branchier*. *Paitre un hagard n'est pas si facile.*"

Was I dreaming? The old language of falconry, which I had read in yellow manuscripts—the old forgotten French of the Middle Ages, was sounding in my ears while the hounds bayed and the hawk's bells tinkled accompaniment to the stamping horses. She spoke again in the sweet, forgotten language:

"If you would rather attach the *longe* and leave your *hagard au bloc*, Raoul, I shall say nothing; for it were a pity to spoil so fair a day's sport with an ill-trained *sors*. *Essimer abaisser*—it is possibly the best way. *Ça lui donnera des reins*. I was perhaps hasty with the bird. It takes time to pass *à la filière* and the exercises *d'escap*."

Then the falconer Raoul bowed in his stirrups and replied: "If it be the pleasure of mademoiselle, I shall keep the hawk."

"It is my wish," she answered. "Falconry I know but you have yet to give me many a lesson in *autourserie*, my poor Raoul. Sieur Piriou Louis, mount!"

The huntsman sprang into an archway and in an instant returned, mounted upon a strong black horse, followed by a *piqueur*, also mounted.

"Ah!" she cried, joyously, "speed Glemarec René! speed! speed all! Sound thy horn, Sieur Piriou!"

The silvery music of the hunting-horn filled the court-yard, the hounds sprang through the gateway, and galloping hoof-beats plunged out of the paved court; loud on the drawbridge, suddenly muffled, then lost in the heather and bracken of the moors. Distant and more distant sounded the horn, until it became so faint that the sudden carol of a soaring lark drowned it in my ears. I heard the voice below responding to some call from within the house.

"I do not regret the chase; I will go another time. Courtesy to the stranger, Pélagie, remember!"

And a feeble voice came quavering from within the house, "*Courtoisie.*"

I stripped and rubbed myself from head to foot in the huge earthen basin of icy water which stood upon the stone floor at the foot of my bed. Then I looked about for my clothes. They were gone, but on a settle near the door lay a heap of garments, which I inspected with astonishment. As my clothes had vanished, I was compelled to attire myself in the costume which had evidently been placed there for me to wear while my own clothes dried. Everything was there—cap, shoes, and hunting doublet of silvery gray homespun; but the close-fitting costume and seamless shoes belonged to another century, and I remembered the strange costumes of the three falconers in the court-yard. I was sure that it was not the modern dress of any portion of France or Brittany; but not until I was dressed and stood before a mirror between the windows did I realize that I was clothed much more like a young huntsman of the Middle Ages than like a Breton of that day. I hesitated and picked up the cap. Should I go down and present myself in that strange guise? There seemed to be no help for it; my own clothes were gone, and there was no bell in the ancient chamber to call a servant, so I contented myself with removing a short hawk's feather from the cap, and, opening the door, went down-stairs.

BY THE fireplace in a large room at the foot of the stairs an old Breton woman sat spinning with a distaff. She looked up at me when I appeared, and, smiling frankly, wished me health in the Breton language, to which I laughingly replied in French. At the same moment my hostess appeared and returned my salutation with a grace and dignity that sent a thrill to my heart. Her lovely head,

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with its dark, curly hair, was crowned with a head-dress which set all doubts as to the epoch of my own costume at rest. Her slender figure was exquisitely set off in the homespun hunting-gown edged with silver, and on her gauntlet-covered wrist she bore one of her petted hawks. With perfect simplicity she took my hand and led me into the garden in the court, and seating herself before a table invited me very sweetly to sit beside her. Then she asked me, in her soft, quaint accent, how I passed the night, and whether I was very much inconvenienced by wearing the clothes which old Pélagie had put there for me while I slept. I looked at my own clothes and shoes, drying in the sun by the garden-wall, and hated them. What horrors they were, compared with the graceful costume which I now wore! I told her this, laughing, but she agreed with me very seriously.

"We will throw them away," she said, in a quiet voice. In my astonishment I attempted to explain that I not only could not think of accepting clothes from anybody, although, for all I knew, it might be the custom of hospitality in that part of the country, but that I should cut an impossible figure if I returned to France clothed as I was then.

She laughed and tossed her pretty head, saying something in old French which I did not understand, and then Pélagie trotted out with a tray on which stood two bowls of milk, a loaf of white bread, fruit, a platter of honeycomb, and a flagon of deep red wine. "You see, I have not yet broken my fast, because I wished you to eat with me. But I am very hungry," she smiled.

"I would rather die than forget one word of what you have said!" I blurted out, while my cheeks burned. "She will think me mad," I added to myself, but she turned to me with sparkling eyes.

"Ah!" she murmured. "Then monsieur knows all that there is of chivalry—"

She crossed herself and broke bread; I sat and watched her white hands, not daring to raise my eyes to hers.

"Will you not eat?" she asked. "Why do you look so troubled?"

Ah, why? I knew it now. I knew I would give my life to touch with my lips those rosy palms; I understood now that from the moment when I looked into her dark eyes there on the moor last night I had loved her. My great and sudden passion held me speechless.

"Are you ill at ease?" she asked again.

Then, like a man who pronounces his own doom, I answered, in a low voice: "Yes, I am ill at ease for love of you." And, as she did not stir nor answer, the same power moved my lips in spite of me, and I said: "I, who am unworthy of the lightest of your thoughts, I, who abuse hospitality and repay your gentle courtesy with bold presumption—I love you."

She leaned her head upon her hands, and answered, softly: "I love you. Your words are very dear to me. I love you."

"Then I shall win you."

"Win me," she replied.

But all the time I had been sitting silent, my face turned towards her. She, also silent, her sweet face resting on her upturned palm, sat facing me, and as her eyes looked into mine I knew that neither she nor I had spoken human speech; but I knew that her soul had answered mine, and I drew myself up, feeling youth and joyous love coursing through every vein. She, with a bright color in her lovely face, seemed as one awakened from a dream, and her eyes sought mine with a questioning glance which made me tremble with delight. We broke our fast, speaking of ourselves. I told her my name and she told me hers—the Demoiselle Jeanne d'Ys.

SHE spoke of her father and mother's death, and how the nineteen of her years had been passed in the little fortified farm alone with her nurse Pélagie, Glemarec René a *piqueur*, and the four falconers, Raoul, Gaston, Hastur, and the Sieur Piriou Louis, who had served her father. She had never been outside the moorland—never even had seen a human soul before, except the falconers and Pélagie. She did not know how she had heard of Kerselec; perhaps the falconers had spoken of it. She knew the legends of Loup Garou and Jeanne la Flamme from her nurse Pélagie. She embroidered and spun flax. Her hawks and hounds were her only distraction. When she had met me there on the moor she had been so frightened that she almost dropped at the sound of my voice. She had, it was true, seen ships at sea from the cliffs, but, as far as the eye could reach, the moors over which she galloped were destitute of any sign of human life. There was a legend which old Pélagie told, how anybody once lost in the unexplored moorland might never return, because the moors were enchanted. She did not

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know whether it was true; she never had thought about it until she met me. She did not know whether the falconers had even been outside, or whether they could go if they would. The books in the house which Pélagie the nurse had taught her to read were hundreds of years old.

All this she told me with a sweet seriousness seldom seen in any one but children. My own name she found easy to pronounce, and insisted, because my first name was Philip, I must have French blood in me. She did not seem curious to learn anything about the outside world, and I thought perhaps she considered it had forfeited her interest and respect from the stories of her nurse.

We were still sitting at the table, and she was throwing grapes to the small field-birds which came fearlessly to our feet.

I began to speak in a vague way of going, but she would not hear of it, and before I knew it I had promised to stay a week and hunt with hawk and hound in their company. I also obtained permission to come again from Kerselec and visit her after my return.

"Why," she said, innocently, "I do not know what I should do if you never came back"; and I, knowing that I had no right to awaken her with the sudden shock which the avowal of my own love would bring to her, sat silent, hardly daring to breathe.

"You will come very often?" she asked.

"Very often," I said.

"Every day?"

"Every day."

"Oh," she sighed, "I am very happy—come and see my hawks."

She rose and took my hand again with a childlike innocence of possession, and we walked through the garden and fruit trees to a grassy lawn which was bordered by a brook. Over the lawn were scattered fifteen or twenty stumps of trees—partially imbedded in the grass—and upon all of these except two sat falcons. They were attached to the stumps by thongs, which were in turn fastened with steel rivets to their legs just above the talons. A little stream of pure spring water flowed in a winding course within easy distance of each perch.

The birds set up a clamor when the girl appeared, but she went from one to another, caressing some, taking others for an instant upon her wrist, or stooping to adjust their jesses.

"Are they not pretty?" she said. "See, here is a falcon-gentil. We call it, 'ignoble,' because it takes the quarry in direct chase. This is a blue falcon. In falconry we call it 'noble,' because it rises over the quarry, and, wheeling, drops upon it from above. This white bird is a gerfalcon from the North. It is also 'noble.' Here is a merlin, and this tiercelet is a falcon-heroner."

I asked her how she had learned the old language of falconry. She did not remember, but thought her father must have taught it to her when she was very young.

Then she led me away and showed me the young falcons still in the nest. "They are termed *niais* in falconry," she explained. "A *branchier* is the young bird which is just able to leave the nest and hop from branch to branch. A young bird which has not yet moulted is called a *sors,* and a *mué* is a hawk which has moulted in captivity. When we catch a wild falcon which has changed its plumage we term it a *hagard*. Raoul first taught me to dress a falcon. Shall I teach you how it is done?"

SHE seated herself on the bank of the stream among the falcons and I threw myself at her feet to listen.

Then the Demoiselle d'Ys held up one rosy-tipped finger and began very gravely.

"First one must catch the falcon."

"I am caught," I answered.

She laughed very prettily and told me my *dressage* would perhaps be difficult, as I was noble.

"I am already tamed," I replied; "jessed and belled."

She laughed, delighted. "Oh, my brave falcon; then you will return at my call?"

"I am yours," I answered, gravely.

She sat silent for a moment. Then the color heightened in her cheeks and she held up her finger again, saying, "Listen, I wish to speak of falconry—"

"I listen, Countess Jeanne d'Ys."

But again she fell into the reverie, and her eyes seemed fixed on something beyond the summer clouds.

"Philip," she said, at last.

"Jeanne," I whispered.

"That is all—that is what I wished," she sighed—"Philip and Jeanne."

She held her hand towards me and I touched it with my lips.

"Win me," she said; but this time it was the body and soul which spoke in unison.

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After a while she began again: "Let us speak of falconry."

"Begin," I replied; "we have caught the falcon."

Then Jeanne d'Ys took my hand in both of hers and told me how with infinite patience the young falcon was taught to perch upon the wrist, how little by little it became used to the belled jesses and the *chaperon à cornette.*

"They must first have a good appetite," she said; "then little by little I reduce their nourishment, which in falconry we call *pât.* When, after many nights passed *au bloc,* as these birds are now, I prevail upon the *hagard* to stay quietly on the wrist, then the bird is ready to be taught to come for its food. I fix the *pât* to the end of a thong, or *leurre,* and teach the bird to come to me as soon as I begin to whirl the cord in circles about my head. At first I drop the *pât* when the falcon comes, and he eats the food on the ground. After a little he will learn to seize the *leurre* in motion as I whirl it around my head, or drag it over the ground. After this it is easy to teach the falcon to strike at game, always remembering to *'faire courtoisie à l'oiseau,'* that is, to allow the bird to taste the quarry."

A squeal from one of the falcons interrupted her, and she arose to adjust the *longe* which had become whipped about the *bloc,* but the bird still flapped its wings and screamed.

"What *is* the matter?" she said; "Philip, can you see?"

I looked around, and at first saw nothing to cause the commotion, which was now heightened by the screams and flapping of all the birds. Then my eye fell upon the flat rock beside the stream from which the girl had risen. A gray serpent was moving slowly across the surface of the bowlder, and the eyes in its flat, triangular head sparkled like jet.

"A *couleuvre,*" she said, quietly.

"It is harmless, is it not?" I asked.

She pointed to the black, V-shaped figure on the neck.

"It is certain death," she said; "it is a viper."

We watched the reptile moving slowly over the smooth rock to where the sunlight fell in a broad, warm patch.

I started forward to examine it, but she clung to my arm, crying, "Don't, Philip, I am afraid!"

"For me?"

"For you, Philip—I love you."

Then I took her in my arms and kissed her on the lips, but all I could say was, "Jeanne, Jeanne, Jeanne." And, as she lay trembling on my breast something struck my foot in the grass below, but I did not heed it. Then again something struck my ankle, and a sharp pain shot through me. I looked into the sweet face of Jeanne d'Ys and kissed her, and with all my strength lifted her in my arms and flung her from me. Then, bending, I tore the viper from my ankle and set my heel upon its head. I remember feeling weak and numb—I remember falling to the ground. Through my slowly glazing eyes I saw Jeanne's white face bending close to mine, and when the light in my eyes went out I still felt her arms about my neck, and her soft cheek against my drawn lips.

WHEN I opened my eyes I looked around in terror. Jeanne was gone. I saw the stream and the flat rock; I saw the crushed viper in the grass beside me, but the hawks and *blocs* had disappeared. I sprang to my feet. The garden, the fruit trees, the drawbridge, and the walled court were gone. I stared stupidly at a heap of crumbling ruins, ivy-covered and gray, through which great trees had pushed their way. I crept forward, dragging my numbed foot, and as I moved a falcon sailed from the tree-tops among the ruins, and, soaring, mounting in narrowing circles, faded and vanished in the clouds above.

"Jeanne! Jeanne!" I cried, but my voice died on my lips, and I fell on my knees among the weeds. And as God willed it, I, not knowing, had fallen kneeling before a crumbling shrine carved in stone for our Mother of Sorrows. I saw the sad face of the Virgin wrought in the cold stone. I saw the cross and thorns at her feet, and beneath it I read:

Pray for the soul of the
Demoiselle Jeanne d'Ys,
who died
In her youth for the love of
Philip, a stranger.
A.D. 1573.

But upon the icy slab lay a woman's glove still warm and fragrant.

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Dear Editors:

APPRECIATION OF "NANEK"

How can I ever thank you enough for this September issue of fantasy's finest?

I rank the Finlay cover as one of his best. "Brand New World" will always be to me the best of Cummings' yarns. And a Guy de Maupassant short is almost too much—to me Guy is the finest of all the short story craftsmen, and I wouldn't have missed this superb tale for anything. What company one finds in a Munsey magazine!

There is another reason why this issue is going to reach near the top rung with me—a most important reason, indeed. A certain young lady of sunny tresses and eyes as gray and wonderful as the sky gets some times at sunset, has been uncomfortably disdainful of my passion for what she scornfully dubs, "butcher nightmares." Despite all my eloquent and fervent appeals she has haughtily declined to do more than glance at my chosen group of magazines. But the September F.F.M. actually bids fair to convert her, or if not convert her, at least to persuade her to take a very tolerant attitude toward the genre. And am I happy!

She read Brand New World and marvelled. "Perhaps I oughtn't," she confesses, "but I can't resist *Zetta*. How quaint and adorable she is . . ." And so on. Splendid, say I. And let us have Ray's "The Sea Girl"—you'll do me and fantasy a great service by converting Libby. Already she has Merritt's "Moon Pool," which I feel sure she will read now, thanks to the September F.F.M.—and once you read "The Moon Pool," well, you're snared for life, believe me!

Now for some endorsements. First, by all means have a Poet's Page. Who doesn't like good poetry? If there should be such let him keep silent, for most of us do. And, by golly, I think you could make it into a big success. That trio of Merritt-inspired poems you ran in the August issue were first rate poetry, and don't let anybody tell you different. I am amazed at their failure to draw a voluminous response from your readers—but perhaps they did and you just lacked the space to print them.

Well, let me contribute this note of appreciation at any rate. I was fortunate enough to see some of "Nanek" Combs' poems even before these were published, and fully a year ago I paged her as Fantasy's rising poet laureate. Perhaps this note will tend to stimulate F.F.M. readers into expressing their opinions as to the desirability of a Poet's Page, and move them to comment on the Combs poetry. Come on, fans, I'd like to see some critical estimates!

Not that my own critical views need confirmation, I know good poetry when I see it, but I do like to hear what others think, and it grows on me that poetry is getting sadly neglected by fantasy addicts. Even Robert Lowndes' magnificent "Song of Nimir" didn't get more than a couple of comments out of your readers. My, my, such indolence!

The three Merritt poems of *la* Combs were not only exquisite bits of rhythmic mastery, they constitute the strongest confirmation of Merritt's creative genius. Takes real writing skill to inspire such genuine poetry, and the Lord of Fantasy has his lordship confirmed once more. He ought to respond by getting to work on those unfinished novels of his. What a contribution to national morale *that* would make!

I have just finished reading Haggard's "She and Allan," a fine story of itself, but even more interesting for the reason it and others had such a wonderful influence upon Merritt. Readers are missing something of deepest interest by not reading Haggard and keeping an eye open for certain source material that the present Lord of Fantasy drew inspiration from for some of *his* finest work. Though Merritt has a strength and depth and fineness that the old English master did not have.

I had not read Haggard in ten years, and I found he could still weave his spell of enthrallment over me—but sadly I had to confess his charms lacked the potency of Merritt's. Yet he—and fandom certainly—owes an unpayable debt to Haggard, and I'm glad to acknowledge it.

Let us hope Merritt himself will have an equal influence upon some young writer—Combs, perhaps—and produce for us a new future master of fantasy. He might do it—who can tell?

In the meantime continue to give us all the unprinted Merritts, especially the complete Moon Pool, and Garret Smith, Serviss, Kline, England, Lovecraft, etc. Yes, and by all means do explore the possibility of giving us the Doc Smith "Skylark" tales. I know these things can be obtained, but the prices are pretty steep, and besides the mags are old, the paper is cheap and crumbly, and new editions need very much to be gotten out . . . who can do that better than Munsey's?

And give us the Poet's Page—if you put it to a vote I know we'll win. I'll bet, too, that you'll acquire a stock of poetic classics for the future. Just demand that the Combs gal, "Ptarek," and the other poets in your midst turn in stuff regularly and see if the Page doesn't become your most popular feature. . .

Congratulations on a fine job,

S. A. McElfresh.

317 Cedar St.,
Lexington, Ky.

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"CREEP, SHADOW!" FINE

Re the August issue: "Creep, Shadow," I think, is one of the best, if not *the* best of the famous Merrittales. This story and "The Metal Monster" seem to be the favorites. Such beauty in description! Where does Merritt find so many adjectives? Truly a genius! "A Roman Resurrection" and "The Outcast" were two swell short stories, but what happened to Flaccus?

The stories that you have reprinted, that I consider the best are as follows: 1. The "Darkness and Dawn" trilogy. 2. "Palos of the Dog Star Pack." 3. The "Radio" Trilogy. 4. "The Girl in the Golden Atom," etc. 5. "Polaris—of the Snows."

I do not rate Merritt's stories for I seem to be inclined, somewhat, toward St.F. "The Blind Spot" cannot be rated because there is a hole in my collection at about the time it came out. I also missed "The Face in the Abyss" and the greater part of "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." These seem to be favorites, for, no matter how much I haunt second-hand stores, people will not "come across" and leave a copy for me.

Your illustrators, Finlay and Paul, are the best in this field. It seems queer to me, though, that people say that Paul is only good at machinery or alien scenes, because if you take a look at his illustrations for "Darkness and Dawn" and "Polaris—of the Snows" you will agree (?) with me that they are not of machinery, etc.

I want to add my vote with the multitude for the reprinting "The Moon Pool" and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" in one issue. The majority, you will find, are for this proposition. So, why not?

Let's have all the sequels to: "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," The "Radio" Trilogy (namely, "the Radio Menace"), "The People of the Golden Atom" (that's "The Man Who Mastered Time," is it not?), and "Polaris—of the Snows."

I'm looking forward to "Into the Infinite," "After a Million Years," "The Ship of Ishtar," "Seven Footprints to Satan," and any of G. A. England's novels. How about "All for his Country," by J. U. Giesy? I wish you could print "The Ark of Fire," by John Hawkins which appeared serially in the American Weekly, about 1936, and the Skylark stories.

Until the September issue, I remain—

R. G. FINKE.

1091 BROOKWOOD ROAD,
OAKLAND, CALIF.

ON SEPT. ISSUE

I have broken a long silence to comment on your magazine which has so greatly improved with the last four issues. All were excellent, even "A Brand New World"; and I do not usually like Cummings.

Your art work has been great; Paul and V. Finlay are favorites of mine. Keep Paul on the adventure stories and Finlay on the fantasy.

Finlay's full page illustration was reminiscent of his similar work in the old "Weird Tales." This is a good policy—keep it up! The cover was also a masterpiece.

One feature I wish you would restore is the Editor's page. Give your predictions of future issues and like news in this section.

When FANTASTIC NOVELS was published, three out of its five main stories were the best it's ever been my pleasure to read. These were "The Blind Spot," "The Snake Mother" and "The Dwellers in the Mirage." A. Merritt, Austin Hall and Francis Stevens are my favorite authors.

I greatly wish to see certain stories in future issues. Why have you stalled all this time to print "Ship of Ishtar"? Finally—would you print the sequel to "The Lord of Death"? I believe it was called "The Queen of Life."

I have a complete set of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES and FANTASTIC NOVELS which is the pride of my collection and if your magazine keeps up to its present standard I will continue to keep this set complete.

A Fan,

ED DARLINGTON.

819 So. JACKSON,
BUTTE, MONTANA.

KEEP IT UP!

Keep it up. F.F.M. is undoubtedly the most interesting magazine of them all. Now that you publish it monthly, you are perfect. What more can we ask for?

SIDNEY PLOTKIN.

604 ADAMS AVE.,
SCRANTON, PA.

THAT ENTHRALLING MERRITT

Congratulations on the August issue of F. F. M. The A. Merritt tale, "Creep, Shadow!" was a masterpiece. Hope to have more like it. It kept me enthralled from the moment I picked up the magazine until I laid it down. Only slightly inferior to "The Metal Monster," it is one of his best.

DAVID MILLER.

306 COLLEGE,
VALDOSTA, GA.

NO COMPLAINTS

Would you be so kind as to send me a list of available back number issues of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, and FANTASTIC NOVELS, together with their prices?

I have only the last two issues of F.F.M. and would like to obtain as nearly complete a file as possible before entering my subscription.

Merritt and Finlay are a sure fire combination. Keep up the good job of bringing the cream from Argosy and you'll never hear a complaint from me.

B. C. HILLIARD.

225 FAYETTE ST.,
MORGANTOWN, WEST VA.

Editor's Note: Such a list is available to those who would like to have it.

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BACK ISSUES WANTED

I've read F.F.M. for about a year and await each new issue very eagerly. The August issue was very good. The cover was one of the best Finlay covers I have seen. The whole English language lacks adjectives to describe it. The Merrittale in this issue was good, although not as good as some others of his.

My files of F.F.M. go back to Oct. 1941 and I would like to acquire any issues before this date from readers who will sell them. Especially I would like to get Geo. Allan England's "Darkness and Dawn" as I have the last two novels of this trilogy.

GEORGE HOVIND.

2323 PROSPECT ST.,
LA CROSSE, WISC.

KEEP 'EM DRAWING!

Here I am again. Main reason for this one is the issue of F.F.M. containing "Creep, Shadow!" Boy, oh, Boy! That cover! Finlay is so far ahead of all other pulp artists that they never will catch him. Let's have more and more of him, please. And how about another series of pictures by him? And where's Bok? Keep 'em drawing!

"Creep, Shadow!" was much more interesting than "Burn, Witch, Burn!" But both of them still have a long way to go to catch up with the "Moon Pool," "Conquest of the Moon Pool," "The Dwellers in the Mirage," and the "Metal Monster."

What I can't understand in "Creep, Shadow!" is why Dahut, who was betrayed by Alan in ancient years would allow the same identical thing to happen again. Some freak of the feminine nature, no doubt. Anyway, it made very interesting reading.

Here's a little information that may help me and some of your readers too. I have extra copies of F.F.M. containing "Citadel of Fear," "The Radio Beasts," and two copies of the issues containing "The Afterglow." I will trade for any of the first three issues of F.F.M. or the copy containing "Sunken Cities."

By the way, is there any hope of reprinting the greatest story of Stanley G. Weinbaum? The one I mean of course is "The Black Flame." I have tried everywhere to secure a copy of it but have not succeeded.

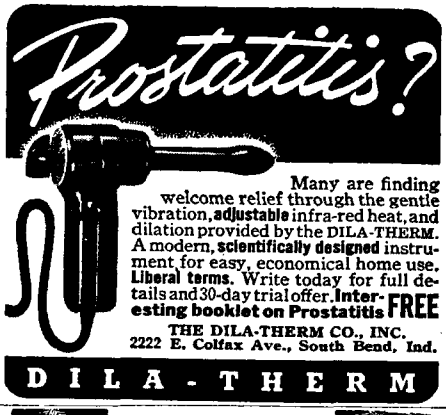
Well, keep those classics coming and I will continue to have F.F.M. Number One on my hit parade. That's where it has been ever since it has been published.

ACREE BROWN.

213 W. INDIANA ST.,
EVANSVILLE, INDIANA.

LAST FOUR ISSUES BEST

I must admit that the last four issues of F.F.M. (June through Sept.) just about bowled me over. When I became a fantasy fan, the issue of your mag. then on the stands featured Francis Stevens "The Citadel of Fear." I didn't care for it. The story that brought me back into line was Farley's "The Radio Planet" of which I had read the first installment in an old Argosy.



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Here is a list of stories I think you should print soon:

E. R. Burroughs: "A Princess of Mars"; "The Gods of Mars"; "At the Earth's Core"; "The Land that Time Forgot."

Ray Cummings: "Tama, Princess of Mercury"; "Tama of the Light Country"; "The Fire Girl."

A. Merritt: "The Ship of Ishtar."

Otis Adelbert Kline: "Maza of the Moon"; "The Swordsman of Mars"; "The Outlaws of Mars."

William Grey Beyer: "Minions of Mars"; "Minions of Mercury"; "Minions of the Moon."

I would like to correspond with fans in New York State from the ages of 15 to 18 who are interested in fantasy and science fiction.

JOHN ROUSE.

166 ROCK ISLAND ST.,
Gouverneur, N. Y.

"THE HORLA" BEST

As A. Merritt is the Lord of Fantasy, so Virgil Finlay is the Lord of Fantastic Illustrating. He has turned out a masterpiece of beauty in his cover for "Creep, Shadow!" Merritt's story is extremely good, but not up to "The Moon Pool," "The Snake Mother," or "The Metal Monster."

Cumming's novel in the September issue was mediocre.

Tod Robbins' story was good, but "The Horla" surpassed it to get first place. (Imagine having de Maupassant and Shakespeare in the same issue.)

By all means reprint E. E. Smith's "Skylark" series, even if they aren't Munsey stories. "The Ark of Fire," also; it was very good.

Rush "The Ship of Ishtar." Has Francis Stevens written any good fantasy that you haven't published?

I agree with "Ptarek's" suggestion of a poetry page. I am enclosing a poem for "The Horla."

BANKS MEBANE.

P. O. Box 1139,
WILSON, N. C.

FOR "THE HORLA"

Through the hoary, far-flung gates
Of time, in never-ending throng,
There sweeps the horde of life.
Life, eternal, that lives, and mates,
And dies; then is replaced
By further life. Forever, strife;
And yet throughout the chaos
There is an order, so evenly spaced
In lines, that mark the worlds.
One line that marks our earth, we cross,
A horde of creatures there; nor
Is man the last . . . for life swirls
Throughout the time of earth.
Yet life must go, for
The ancient portals of time cry out
For life, and of it never is there dearth.

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SO many people with the "germ" of writing in them simply can't get started. They suffer from inertia. Or they set up imaginary barriers to taking the first step.

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ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. yo may find that the itching is relieve You should paint the infected pa with H.F. each night until your fe are better. Usually this takes fro three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin so and smooth. You may marvel at t quick way it brings you relief. costs you nothing to try, so if y- are troubled with Athlete's Fo why wait a day longer.

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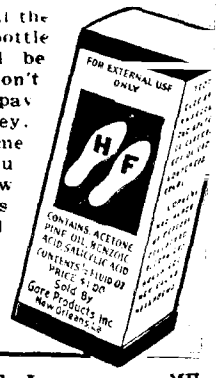
Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money. don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



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At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is both contagious and infectious and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

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